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UNDERSTANDING GENDER ISSUES IN SELECTING AND WORKING WITH TWO SHORT STORIES

BY

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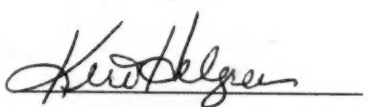

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled UNDERSTANDING GENDER ISSUES IN SELECTING AND WORKING WITH TWO SHORT STORIES submitted by KERI LYNN HELGREN in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education.

Dr. Margaret Iveson

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Dr. Jill McClay

Date: February 14, 2002

Dedication

To my beautiful boys
Kenan and Roen
who came into this world
during the pursuit of my degree.
May your futures be influenced by my new understandings.

Abstract

This study examines the interplay among teacher gender, student gender and the gender of the author/narrator/protagonist in literature and corresponding activity choices. Twenty-one English 20 students and three colleagues contributed their notions of gender and the influences it has both in and out of the classroom.

The classroom activities relating to gender and gender issues illustrate that students are very knowledgeable of the changes that have occurred in society and of gender expectations, although many of their notions of each other are stereotyped.

A shift in the discussion of one of the short stories acknowledged students' strong opinions of how they believed their gender and their teacher's gender influences their appreciation of literature and their overall achievement.

This study also revealed that students recognize the dilemma that teachers face when selecting literature – not all students will be able to relate to or appreciate the selections. More importantly, students value the opportunity to include their own reading choices as part of their course requirements.

The gender and brain research, as well as the students' reactions to the two pieces of literature and accompanying activities may provide educators with new ideas to ponder while designing gender equitable classroom activities.

Acknowledgements

As I sit back and reflect on the five years I have been working to bring this journey to an end, I must pause and thank the people who contributed to my quest for understanding.

First, I wish to thank my English 20 students for their cooperation, trust and support. They started out as my English 10 students who knew they were going to be a part of a research study, grew into the English 20 students I counted on to gain new understandings about my teaching practice, and finished as fine, mature and insightful English 30 students who, for most, achieved their personal bests as they finished their high school English careers. I feel that I have come to know them even more after working so closely with their journals and know that this is one group of students I will miss dearly and never forget.

I want to thank my advisor, Dr. Marg Iveson, but I just do not think that the words 'thank you' will suffice. This journey feels like such a long one and I know without her gentle encouragement, especially when I felt like the task was too large or I was too distanced from the university, I would never have completed my degree. She constantly reminded me that I was simply a human being completing a research and writing task, and was never required to be a superhuman attempting to complete the impossible. She gave me the freedom and the encouragement to find my own voice within the pages of this paper and I am pleased with the results.

A special thank you must be reserved for the two other members of my committee, Dr. Ingrid Johnston and Dr. Jill McClay. I was somewhat anxious about defending my work with two people in the room I was quite unfamiliar with. However, I felt instantly at ease as they discussed my work with me, creating a collegial and supportive atmosphere. It was a great experience to be able to talk about my study and my new understandings.

To my husband, Darren, whose support was also instrumental in keeping me on track and devoted to completing this project. Thank you for all the nights you spent alone, listening to me pound away on my computer keyboard, and all the days you spent with our boys so Mommy could research and draft. I will love you always.

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Chapter One
A Personal History with the Question of Gender

The word girl had formerly seemed to me innocent and unburdened, like the word child; now it appeared that it was no such thing.

Alice Munro

I do not ever remember a time when I wished I were anything but a girl. I enjoyed my femininity and the opportunities that the world offered me. I never believed that I wanted to realize different dreams than all of the other little girls in pigtails. I wanted to be the engineer who became an astronaut who was also a dedicated mother who married her prince. Sure, these dreams may seem dialectical in nature to some, but I think they showed my self-confidence and imagination. In my balanced world, I felt adequately nurtured as a human being, feeling that my ideas were valued and respected.

I know that my choice to pursue education as a career can be credited to my high school English teacher, Mr. Jacobsen. A young teacher at the time, he brought many new and exciting ideas into our classroom that built in me a passion for literature, writing and exploring ideas that was never paralleled in my university courses. I remember taking part in writers' and readers' workshops, doing book-talks instead of book reports, and experiencing literature through dramatic processes. I never looked at Mr. Jacobsen as a male teacher and I never felt that his courses were in any way affected by gender related choices. I always felt included through the literature and during activities beyond the literature, always believing we had a good rapport and mutual respect for each other. My only school experience with sophisticated analysis of English came from Mr. Jacobsen as he was my English teacher for grades 9-12, and it was his classroom assignments which inspired me to read the classics and write outside of the classroom. It was this love of literature that I took with me as I voyaged to university to pursue my own teaching career.

However, my previous experiences with literature were in direct contrast with what I saw happening in my English classes at the university. While I connected so strongly with my high school English teacher, regardless of gender, I could not connect at all with the arrogance and egos of the male professors I had at the

university. One of the English courses I took in the Faculty of Arts had a female instructor, and that was an introductory course. There was something about the male professors I encountered that seemed very traditionalistic and canonistic -- male protagonists, male authors, male ideas -- women not allowed. I remember one professor who told me that once I began to think more like he did I would be better at analyzing poetry and prose of the British Romantic Period. Experiences like these had a strong impact on my impressions of those in the position to be teaching about literature. Their choices, like the choices my high school English teacher made, had a direct influence on the way I interpreted and gained meaning from the literature I was exposed to. They also influenced my love of literature, just not in the same way as Mr. Jacobsen did.

As a woman, having embarked on my own teaching career, I still cannot ever remember a time when I wasn't happy with my gender or my gender role. As an educator, I think I even secretly believed that my gender helped reach out to students in ways that my male colleagues could not. Perhaps I was personally modeling certain gender roles in my own classroom, but it never seemed inappropriate or wrong. My students were learning and I had great rapport and great results. I was a teacher and a good one at that.

Four years into my teaching career, I found myself holding the acceptance letter from the University of Alberta, Department of Graduate Studies and Research, somewhat apprehensively. I was proud to be defying the words of my principal, who said I would be nothing but a classroom English teacher for the rest of my career.

I remember the day, in my first year of teaching, sitting around one of the staff room tables with my principal sitting beside me. As usual, the veterans of the profession were complaining about their wages, working conditions and overall dissatisfaction with their jobs. As an idealistic novice, I couldn't share their views and eagerly countered with some of my professional goals. I wanted to teach for two years, go back to university for my master's, work towards a career at the university as a professor and perhaps even start my own English Language Arts consulting firm. My principal scoffed at me, shook his head and told me I would be nothing but a classroom teacher for my entire career. Not that I think there is anything wrong with being a classroom teacher, I just couldn't believe that he was counting me out before I really even had a chance to get started. I think he even threw in a comment about the gray-haired bun and the starched blue suit. I think that was a turning point for me, as

there is nothing that motivates me more than being told I can't do something. Perhaps that is why I was so eager to place the application for my master's program in front of him and equally as eager to brag about being accepted.

Four years later, as I was walking my own professional journey which began in that school and had me step foot once again on the university campus, the "what am I really doing here" question continued to linger in the darkened alleys of my mind. With a full time teaching job and a desire to research something about my profession, how was I going to find the time to fit it all in and make an impact on educational practice?

Two summers ago, in preparation for my summer session courses, I was cleaning out some of my university course binders, tucking the treasures of valuable information and resources into a central file. Stuck inside one of the binders, I found an extremely valuable piece of looseleaf, which contained some of my excited scribbles. This morsel contained some of my musings about the English 10 course I teach. I noticed on that paper the short story titles I bragged to my fellow teachers about – the short stories that I just HAD to teach. These were short stories I had gathered from many different, antiquated anthologies that were no longer on the approved list, but contained gems that spoke volumes to me and seemed to work well in my classroom in various ways. Interestingly enough, with the exception of one of the short stories, all of the protagonists and/or narrators were female. Stories like "Boys and Girls" by Alice Munro, "Anointed with Oils" by Alden Nowlan, "A Trip for Mrs. Taylor" by Hugh Garner and "The Sniper" by Liam O'Flaherty. The literature I had chosen to create my short story unit around seemed to speak with a predominately female voice.

My thoughts, full of wonder and chaos, turned to the other pieces of literature that made up the content of my English 10. As I continued to list the titles of pieces I had used, a pattern began to emerge -- I had created a literature based course full of female perspectives.

The last group of English 10 students I had taught, I had also had for Language Arts 9. Thinking back, the achievement results on the provincial achievement exam for the boys and the girls seemed pretty even in my mind. However, the top three students in my English 10 class were girls and there was only one boy in the 70s out of 30 students. These reflections on my last teaching experience with English 10 and my latest discovery about course content had my research mind intrigued.

Why did I choose literature that contained a female protagonist, and narrator? Did I have a preference for female authors, narrators/protagonists? I was unaware I did it subconsciously, so what are the implications of those types of beyond my conscious control choices? Did I choose the literature I did because of what Crawford and Chaffin (1986) describe as my female gender schema, created from my unique background and experiences? Or where my choices restricted to the available resources, both approved and/or antiquated dust gatherers? What type of activities was I choosing for the literature the students read? Were the activities engaging all students or were they influenced again by my gender schema?

Was my teaching then only reaching the girls in the class, who would share my gender identity? Where did that leave the boys in my room? What kind of socialization patterns was I creating and propagating in my classroom by choosing predominately female literature?

However, a larger question loomed in my mind and touched me at the emotional core of me as an educator -- were all my students understanding and appreciating the literature in the ways I had hoped they would when I selected it and chose activities around it? Gabriel (1990) acknowledges that many changes in the curriculum have occurred which had allowed for the infusion of female authors and female texts, but she argues that "many instructors still do not consider gender differences in reader response when creating or evaluating writing assignments" (p. 130). She believes that the problem centres on the lack of data that corroborates theories of gender influence on readers and text creators. As well, Roen (1992) suggests that all teachers, because we are simply human, can bring a wide array of gender-stereotypes to the task of reading student papers. Was I taking advantage of the now available female texts and female authors at the expense of the boys in the room? What specific gender-related stereotypes – founded or not – was I bringing into my classroom activities and at whose expense? Could I collect some data in this study that would contribute to a new understanding of gender and its influence on readers?

All of a sudden, the notion of being a female and an educator took on a wealth of layers I could barely begin to understand. I needed to peel away the layers and decide how much my gender, the gender of my students and the literature I choose in my classroom impact both my teaching practice, and my students' understanding and appreciation of literature.

So here begins my personal journey -- as a woman, as an educator and as a researcher.

The Focus of the Study

After a great deal of inner dialogue, I narrowed down my inquiry into four components of teacher gender, student gender, author gender and gender of the protagonist/narrator in literature, all of which I believe are an integral part of the selection of literature in my English classrooms. My quest concerned itself with the question of **when aware of issues of gender in an English classroom, how does the interplay between teacher gender, student gender and the gender of the author, narrator and protagonist in a piece of literature influence a teacher's choices of literature and classroom activities.**

Specifically, I used this study to look at the following areas:

1. What criteria have I used in the past to select the literature I use in my English 20 classroom?

2. What are the connections, if any, between my female gender and the gender of the author, narrator and protagonist in the literature I choose to teach?

3. What effect does an ongoing professional dialogue, which develops between both male and female colleagues, have on issues of gender in my classroom decisions?

4. In what ways do students respond to literature and the corresponding activities presented to them which are centred on the teacher's awareness of gender issues in the English classroom?

The Students

I limited the study to my own English 20 classroom in a small rural school in central Alberta. The community has a mid to lower socio-economic background, with a growing number of students coming from foster homes or single parent homes. The school is a K-12 school, with approximately 600 students. Many of the students in my English 20 classroom have been together since kindergarten. There were 21 students enrolled in my English 20 class, and I taught all of these students in English 10 the previous year.

This particular group of students was a tight knit one. They were quite supportive of each other and worked individually and in many different group situations quite well. Rapport was easy to build with them as they had lots of personality and loved to discuss their ideas and the ideas present in the literature we worked with. The strength of this group of students was not their academic stronghold on English Language Arts, but their ability to challenge each other in the discussion of literature. All of the students had their own set opinions and felt quite free to share them, openly and honestly.

There were distinct peer groups within the class, but they were not really barriers as the students would work cooperatively with each other and there was no real sense of hostility or us against them mentality.

Interestingly enough, there were 10 girls and 11 boys in this class, creating a gender balance with me representing the female voice that equaled out the numbers. The boys and girls were equally strong in discussion, sharing their opinions and ideas quite freely in equal numbers. The academic abilities favored neither the boys nor the girls in reading comprehension or writing, with a great deal of strength and potential in both groups. There were four very outspoken male voices in the room and there were four very outspoken female voices in the room who loved to play off each other and challenge each other. This class took a great deal of energy to keep on topic and sometimes I just didn't even want to.

A Notion of Autobiographical Action Research

In the early stages of my project design, I would describe my choices for research methodology as ones that fell into the realm of what I understood action

research to be.

Essentially, I understood that action research was an active process where the researcher could learn through a research project that would have impact his or her practice. This particular research method held some familiarity as I felt that I undertook small action research projects throughout any given year in each of my classes. I always wondered how I could do things better or differently, or reach a student I was having trouble reaching. I would modify activities, lesson plans and full unit choices to meet the needs of my students and to learn about the art of teaching.

Through reading, I have learned more about action research and how its principles are reflected in my study. The action research movement began in the 1940s with the work of Kurt Lewin. Lewin was interested in research for social change, particularly concerned that research often remained in books and was never transcribed into practice (Carson 1988). Action research has undergone a variety of thematic alterations over the years, with one of the most current variations speaking to my classroom project. Critically reflective action research can be seen as a "genuinely educative science of education which moves participants beyond merely solving their problems in-view. By beginning with these, and by extending the range of analysis and reflection, [teachers] may gain new insights into their own work situations and taken for granted assumptions" (Carson, p. 5).

According to Carson (1988), there are four ethical considerations/ knowledge bases that make up action research. One, action research is undertaken to solve practical teaching or school life problems. Two, action research requires collaboration between participants. Three, action research involves educators who share a common goal; and four, action research is essentially "emancipatory and liberating (in that the process of action research typically leads to the unconscious and conscious unravelling of the limits to educational practice)" (p. vii).

McKernan (1991) outlines that the rationale for action research lies in three reasonable truths. One, "that naturalistic settings are best studied and researched by those participants experiencing the problem; second, that behavior is highly influenced by the natural surroundings in which it occurs: and third, that qualitative methodologies are perhaps best suited for researching naturalistic settings" (p. 5). All three of these truths spoke directly to my study as it was limited to my classroom setting, with my students and their individual as well as group responses to literature and activities. McKernan (1991) also states that "action research engages both teacher

and student in a shared search for knowledge – as such, it is an educative experience for both" (p. 34). Having this study take place within the walls of my classroom, I was eager to ensure that my project was a shared learning experience for both my students and me.

McKernan (1991) describes a variety of observational and narrative research methods employed by action researchers. Participant observation, journals or logs, observational field notes, small group and large group discussions, and questionnaires (open-ended questions) were used in my study. I also used some of my own research methods for gathering data such as student metacognitive or learning journals, reader's response journals, visual representations and oral presentations. As I began to write about my study I also found myself using topical life history, focussing on the investigation of the theme of gender and literature selection and my development as a teacher. As the study unfolded and had its lived moments in my classroom, I felt that yes, I was, as McKernan (1991) summarizes, engaging in research that would help me become a better practitioner as well as learn more about myself, my students and my problems in the classroom.

However, it was not until I was well into the analysis of my data and drafting of this document that I began to discover my research study was more than just an action research study. As my personal stories as an English student, a university student and a beginning teacher trickled out onto the pages of my paper the thesis began to take on a very autobiographical form. I felt compelled to tell my stories as well as the stories of my classroom and the students who were parts of the study and I wanted to be sure that my voice and experience as well as the voices and experiences of my students were authentically represented. It was through this process of storytelling that I felt I could come to some understandings about gender in my classroom. Was I out to improve my teaching practice? Yes, but I became more interested in what Usher (1998) calls "the experiences of the self [which] are a source of knowledge and a valuable pedagogic resource which can be harnessed to learning, person development and the liberatory giving of voice" (p. 18). Essentially, what had begun to emerge was an action research study, told with a strong autobiographical voice. The two are not mutually exclusive, but are common and quite natural in accounts of action research. Parker (1998) outlines that educational action research often requires the researcher to write herself into the accounts of her research. Griffiths (1995) notes that both autobiographical writing and action research have the

personal story at their core and can be demanding and painful, but learning "from the stories of others is…an excellent way of improving one's own vision and practices" (p. 104).

Thomas (1995) acknowledges Abbs' (1974) landmark publication *Autobiography in Education* as the arrival of a distinctive approach to the study of teachers and teaching.

> From these early beginnings, there has been a steady increase in the number of books, research reports and dissertations which have, through a variety of approaches, taken seriously the idea that much of value to the educational community can be learned by conversing with, and listening attentively to, what teachers have to say about their classroom practices, their experiences of schools and of the formal and informal relationship within them, their insights into pupils as learners, and the corpus of professional understandings and craft knowledge that derives from experience (p. 4).

Usher (1998) believes that autobiographical research is "ideally suited to revealing experience-based learning and in tracking the development of the self as learner" (p. 18). This statement certainly reflected what I wanted to learn about gender through real classroom experiences and of course, about myself as a teacher, especially in the areas of literature and activity selection.

This thesis has become a representation of me and my students' classroom experiences with gender. Usher (1998) notes that autobiography is truly a representation "of the self through inscription, telling the story of the self through a written text and writing a text through a culturally encoded meta-story" (p. 19). Norman (2001) believes that autobiographical writing in education is "a product which can be interrogated in terms of identity and representation" (p. 11). She also acknowledges that the words a writer uses as well as the words a writer chooses to omit can color the writer's memories. However, she takes this comment one step further by asking if this coloring makes a memory invalid or false? "Can we ever not distort what we write by virtue of the very words we use, the way we order them and choose them and arrange them?" (p. 231). This representation of my classroom can only be assumed to be accurate, as it is one re-created by me as I observed, read and re-read my notes, analyzed student journals and artifacts, and reflected on the

happenings in my classroom. Usher (1998) believes that once the person behind autobiographical text is located "this presence seems to guarantee both the sincerity and authenticity of the self of the story" (p. 21). These new understandings are sure to be the ones that will influence my teaching practice.

Literature Selected for the Study

My research was filled with various assumptions. The fundamental one was that there is an interplay between a teacher's gender and the literature he or she chooses to use in his or her classroom and it is this interplay that has an impact on student response to literature in the classroom. This assumption was based solely on my own experience, and although my experience was unique, it would speak to others.

For the purpose of my inquiry, I looked at my choices of short story, a genre that I have personally noticed biases in my own choices. I limited the study to the selection, teaching, and student response to two short stories, "Boys and Girls" by Alice Munro, and "Butcher Bird" by Wallace Stegner. I specifically wanted two stories -- one that was written by a female author with a female protagonist or narrator, and one that was written by a male author with a male protagonist or narrator.

When I first envisioned a classroom project to discover some possible answers to the questions I posed about gender, the story "Boys and Girls" by Alice Munro seemed a natural choice. I have typically taught this story at the English 10 or English 30 level as it fits into the themes I have developed for those courses. The story centres on a young female narrator, who loses her innocence in a world that forces her to accept her gender role and become the girl she is supposed to be. The story has issues of gender stereotyping at its core from a female perspective. It also deals with a universal theme of discovering who you are and how society molds the people we become, which seems to connect to adolescent readers well. I guess I have a personal bias, since as a reader, I enjoy the story a great deal. First, it is a piece of Canadian literature, written by a respected Canadian writer. Second, I have been surprised at the reactions of students to the issues raised by the story and by the ability of my students to analyze the literary elements that contribute to the development of those themes. This short story generally meets the reading interests and personal experiences of my students well enough and the literary merit is there – what more could a teacher ask for?

Finding the second short story, by a male author with a male protagonist or narrator proved to be a much more difficult task for me. I looked through anthologies available to me, and was not satisfied with any of the choices in front of me. I remember thinking that I would want to remember this fact as it may help to illustrate the assumption I had that there is an interplay between a teacher's gender and the gender of the author/protagonist/narrator of the literature selected for use in the classroom. My struggle to find this selection seemed to point in this direction.

In consultation with my advisor, I decided to go with her recommendation of "Butcher Bird" by Wallace Stegner, found in the old English 20 prose anthology *Prose for Discussion*. I had only taught out of this text for the first year of my career, eight years ago, and it had sat on a shelf since then. The story creates a very masculine world centred on a father who becomes angered and insecure as his wife and son see new ways of living he can't necessarily provide. One afternoon at a neighbour's house causes riffs between the father, his wife and his son. The issues of gender stereotyping are not as dominant a theme in this short story, but the roles of the man and the woman are clearly defined. The young boy as the narrator leaves the reader to interpret the dialogue and the actions of the characters as seen through the boy's eyes.

As a reader, I liked the contrast set up by this short story and the strength of the symbol of the butcher bird appealed to me as a teacher as well. I found I had an emotional reaction to the story, as I felt for the wife who simply wanted to make life a bit more livable, and really hated the father for the way he treated his family and his killing of the sparrow to close the story. I was a bit concerned about never having taught this story before, but I have always told my students to take risks and try new things, so I felt I should lead by example.

Both stories are about the same length and about the same readability level. They both deal with family relationships, which I felt, would be an easy first access for all my students.

Collection of Data

I wanted to be directly involved in my research, as I knew the outcome of my study would directly impact my personal teaching practice. Millman (1987) notes research from May and Ruddock (1983) which proposes that teachers work best with knowledge that is generated from their own experiences and that reflects their particular circumstances. As my initial questions arose from my own experiences in

the classroom, I wanted to play an active role in discovering what impact gender does have in my classroom.

In this study, I used a variety of methods to collect the data I needed. According to Millman (1987), if research is to be undertaken at the same time as the teacher is carrying out her normal teaching duties, the method of data collection would have to be manageable, and that was very important to me, especially being a novice researcher. I believe the variety of ways I chose to collect my data was important as there were so many factors involved. The only way to triangulate was to collect data from all those involved -- the teachers, the students and the literature.

I kept a research journal that gave me a chance to reflect on my planning sessions, delivery of lessons, students' responses, discussions with colleagues and any other internal musings about the research. This artifact has become very important in addressing the sub-questions I posed about teachers and their choices.

I actively pursued professional dialogue with male and female colleagues relating to issues of gender and emergent ideas from my study as it progressed. This dialogue informed my study effectively and gave me many more ideas to consider and explore. Many of the colleagues were people I would see at government examination marking sessions, with my curriculum work, as well as ones I have interacted with on a more personal level. I initiated email correspondence to share my ideas and observations. Their role was to inform my planning, delivery and analysis of data and to share their impressions and ideas related to gender and their own experiences in the classroom throughout the study.

Unfortunately, with my colleagues being as busy as I was at the end of the school year, not a great deal of correspondence was received in the months April to June 2000. I reinitiated our correspondence in the fall of 2000, which has helped me understand some of my own thoughts and workings in my English classroom during the study.

In my English classroom, students keep a daily metacognitive learning journal, which gives them an opportunity to express their ideas and opinions, share their learning experiences, make connections between the texts we study and their own world as well as many other metacognitive type activities. I used this learning journal as part of my data collection as it has informed me of the students' individual perceptions of their learning and has given them an opportunity to discuss their ideas in a very comfortable and well known medium.

As well, during my short story units, I typically use a literature/response-based journal. Therefore, to address the issue of student's appreciation and understanding of literature, I used a response journal approach. I used an adaptation of Probst's (1982) model of readers' response and some adaptations of a reader's response approach used by Jerry Wowk, which I have successfully adopted in my classroom.

In small group situations, a recorder was chosen to jot down a running notation of the discussion the group members had. I asked them to try to capture as much of the original dialogue as they could in a clear, point form notation. In the larger group discussion round tables, each student wrote down the comments and ideas shared by his or her peers in point form as well. I specifically asked the students to help me gather information this way as I too kept a notebook full of point form jottings that attempted to capture the ideas shared by the students. With twenty-one students and one teacher writing down ideas, I felt confident that the ideas shared would be recorded with a degree of completeness and accuracy that would help me in my data analysis after the study was complete.

Typically, the short story unit is one that I teach by genre, and it usually follows one thematic unit used to review major concepts in all genres and to reintroduce students to the formal study of literature. This year, I chose to teach the thematic unit to begin my course, following it with a study of the modern drama *Billy Bishop Goes to War*. In mid April, following the completion of these first two units, I introduced the short story unit to my students.

The two short stories that the students worked with at the close of the unit were the focus of my data collection and analysis. These selections were introduced at the close of the unit and took approximately 10 80-minute class periods to work with. Prior to these activities, students had extensive review on short story theory, and had completed a variety of activities on three other short stories.

Throughout the unit, they had been consistently working with their literature response journals and their learning journals. By the time the work on the short stories chosen began, students had all the terms they needed and a great deal of practice working with and discussing short stories.

Activities Designed for Students

I wanted to create activities that would give the students the opportunity to explore their own notions of gender and to learn about gender and gender stereotyping. As well, I wanted to select activities that would give them opportunities to work individually, in same sex groupings, and in mixed sex groupings.

I also wanted to see if my new, conscious awareness of gender issues in the classroom had any specific impact on my activity planning strategies. I began thinking about the activities I wanted in my classroom after a month of having worked with my English 20 students. I started first looking at some of the research I had done last summer into issues of gender in the classroom. I felt if I started here, I would certainly get some ideas for places to begin.

One of the first ideas I discovered in my reading was information on male and female behavior in group situations. Grossman and Grossman (1984) summarize a study by Maccoby, which outlines how males play a dominant role in mixed sex groups throughout their school years. Boys typically initiate more of the interaction, do more talking and play a more influential role in the decision making in a group situation than the girls do. Girls are responsive to ideas from both boys and girls, while boys are primarily responsive to ideas expressed by their male counterparts.

The study also outlines the behavior of boys in all-boy groups. Boys in these groups will often interrupt each other, use commands or threats, even boasts of authority. They more often refuse to agree with another boy's demand, present information more often, heckle a speaker, tell jokes or suspenseful stories, and desire to "top" someone else's story or call another boy a name. Girls in all-girl groups more often express agreement and support with another girl's comment, will pause to give another girl a chance to speak, and will acknowledge what someone else has said before continuing with their own ideas. Speech serves an egoistic function for boys and a socially binding function for girls.

These ideas I found intriguing, as I believed one of the best ways to address issues of gender was by having the students form both same sex and mixed sex groupings to discuss ideas present in the literature. I was not as interested in analyzing their group processes as I was in giving them two different forums for the discussion of ideas that they could then bring to the larger group discussion and reflect on in their metacognitive journals.

Grossman and Grossman (1984) also present an idea that I believe relates to the main focus of my thesis – "females and males learn and remember better information that is relevant to their gender roles and conforms to their gender stereotypes.... they may have difficulty accepting and processing information that runs counter to their preconceived notions about gender roles" (p. 23). The authors also present the idea of how some educators encourage teachers to use a variety of different teaching-styles with each gender.

Another idea that I found interesting was presented by McCracken and Appleby (1992) who believe that most of today's classrooms have been structured in a way that favors a competitive, reporting style of conversation that has been genderized as male. Students take a turn at reporting knowledge in a competitive series. They also wonder how girls respond to the heavily male dominated literary works presented to them in class. "Do they take the point of view of male narrators and heroes, or do they try to peek into the female characters' minds, where they exist in the traditional school curriculum works such as *1984, Of Mice and Men,* or *Julius Caesar*?" (p. 5). On the other hand, the authors wonder if there is there anything in the works presented to them that the boys can use to challenge their gender stereotypes and give them an insight into the female experience.

I wanted to make sure that I developed a variety of activities that would speak to both the males and the females in my classroom. I wanted to reduce the competitive, one at a time turn taking sort of discussion atmosphere as the dominant mode of sharing ideas in my classroom. After reading, I realized that each step in the lessons I created would not meet the needs of both groups who were attempting to understand and appreciate the literature being studied. The interesting aspect would be to what extent the needs would be met or not met by the individuals in my classroom.

The last piece of research that struck me prior to creating my activities was the information presented on the use of the journal in the classroom. I use the response journal and learning or metacognitive journal in my classroom and have for many years. Interestingly enough, I discovered after reading Appleby (1992) that the use of journals in the classroom is heavily biased towards females. Appleby (1992) states that "male students tend to see no difference between diaries and journals and are comfortable with neither" (p. 19). He notes that very few males keep personal journals. Males will use their journals to vent and plan but they will rarely use them to

discuss any aspect of their personal life. Girls, on the other hand, write twice as much as boys do. Their entries are often very extended, reflective, detailed pieces that contain social, academic and personal concerns.

After reading some of this information, I was concerned about using two journals during the study, but the students were familiar with both types of responses having done them in their English 10 course and during the first unit we worked on together in English 20. I decided to go ahead with my plans for the journal responses, integrating questions about this method of response into the study. I was interested in what my students had to say about this learning strategy.

Below is a brief outline of the activities that were planned for the unit. A detailed set of lesson plans has been placed in Appendix A.

To begin the study, students were asked about their own notions of gender and the characteristics of males and females. They did some initial jotting and sharing and then created visual representations of their notions of male and female. They worked in same sex groups for this activity.

After sharing the visual representations, I read the short story "X" by Lois Gould orally to the students. This story focuses on the idea that a child can be raised in society with no apparent male or female specific characteristics labeled to it. After reading, I had them write a spontaneous response, discussed by Probst (1982), which is essentially an immediate reaction to the literature presented to them. They shared their ideas and then turned their attention to the idea of gender expectations historically and now. Ideas were recorded on chart paper and displayed on the classroom wall for the entire unit.

For the short story, "Boys and Girls" by Alice Munro, students were given an opportunity to read the chosen selection on their own and formulate their own, initial response in a journal form. The format for response followed Probst's (1982) response theories and a specific format adopted for response by Jerry Wowk, which I received at an in-service I had attended a year earlier. Four lesson plans were then delivered, with various individual, same sex and mixed sex group activities for students to engage in, including a viewing of the film version of the short story. A second look entry was then assigned, giving the students the opportunity to reflect on the class discussion and the short story/film for a second time. As well, learning journal entries were also completed at the close of each of the lessons.

With a few modifications, a similar procedure was followed, for the short story "Butcher Bird" by Wallace Stegner. A few of the differences included an oral reading of this short story, with students and me sharing the reading duties. I also did not have a film version of this short story and about forty minutes less of time was used to discuss the actual story.

To end the study, I had students engage in two formal activities. One, they had to present an improvised scene, which asked the mixed sex groups to work together to select a specific scene dominated by one gender. They were required then to break back into their same sex groups and present their interpretation of that chosen scene. For some of the groups, the scene would contain characters that matched their gender and for others the characters would not match their gender. The second assignment was for the students to create a personal journal entry or monologue from the point of view of a character from the short stories studied. They needed to accurately represent that character's personality, voice and motivation.

All the work the students did for me, including response entries, brainstorming, and the final activities, were all recorded in a blue duo-tang I provided for them. Their learning journal entries were placed in their metacognitive journals, which I collected at the end of term.

The Interviews

After some initial readings of the journals, I selected four students from my class, for interview purposes. The target was two females and two males. As I am aware of the limitations of reader's response, I believed that the interviews could allow for a richer description of the students' experiences. Perhaps their notions of gender and what they expect from literature and teachers could also be explored. The questions I asked the students were created from their responses and my own internal musings as reflected in my personal journal.

The students I selected for the interviews represented a variety of strengths from the English 20 classroom. Before beginning the research project in the classroom, I had an idea of which students I might want to interview, as I know them so well. What was surprising was that I only ended up choosing one of those students who I had in mind at first. The other three surprised me with their comments and participation level and became obvious choices for the interview aspect of my study.

Unfortunately, time in the school year ran out and my carefully made plans for good audio voice recording equipment fell through as my colleague went on long term disability leave. Not wanting to lose the potential data to be gained from the interview process, I printed out the questions, gave a set to each of the four selected students and asked them to complete them, much like a questionnaire, over the summer. The questions were presented to them in a manila envelope, stamped and addressed by me.

Ethical Considerations

Each of the student participants and colleagues in my study were informed orally and in writing of the study and the role they would play, including their right to look over the study where their individual ideas had been used and their right to anonymity. The students were informed that the study was going to be integrated naturally into their English 20 course, although they could specifically request that their work be excluded from the study for analysis purposes. As well, a letter was sent home to each of my students' parents, informing them of the study and the role their child would play. Consent was received from all the parents and the students in my room and from the four colleagues I had chosen to participate in my study.

In order to protect the identities of the students and colleagues, who contributed to my study, I do not use the real names of the people involved. When required, I will be referring to the students in my room and the colleagues I relied on for my email correspondence by pseudonym.

Structure of the Thesis

As I began designing this study, reading and researching, as well as finishing my required course work at the university, I became intrigued with the whole notion of how I would put my final thesis together. Many of my colleagues, relying on their thesis design courses, had opted for the traditional five chapter thesis, containing one chapter of literature review. As my ideas for the study began to unfold, I did not feel that the standard structure would suit the study I had designed or the voices I wished to represent.

Three years earlier, I had the opportunity to act as a pre-interview subject for a fellow graduate student, Karen MacGregor. She included her observations of our

mock interview in her final thesis entitled *Reflections of Teacher Writers* and as a courtesy, she forwarded a copy of her thesis to me. I never really had an opportunity to read her thesis, but once I was in the middle of designing my own, my attention did turn to her paper.

What I discovered was a non-standard, six chapter thesis. She had written the number of chapters that reflected her data and her analysis. As well, she had included her research findings throughout the document, weaving them in as she found researchers who had findings relevant to her themes. I felt that this placement of research information, carefully integrated throughout the document, made her thesis very readable, which was something that was important to me. I was particularly struck at how she incorporated a large number of quotations from the teacher-writers she interviewed. I believe that it lent itself to an authenticity of voice and a credibility of information that I really wanted in my own thesis. MacGregor (1997) essentially allowed the data to determine her organizational patterns and allowed the voices of her subjects to speak on a variety of themes.

Feeling both welcomed and comfortable as I flipped the pages of her thesis, I felt that this particular way of representing my ideas and the ideas of my students was one I wished to emulate. I decided to allow the project I had designed and the data I had collected to organize this paper and to carefully weave the voices of the researchers in with the voices of my colleagues, my students and myself.

The thesis is organized somewhat chronologically, closely following the project as it unfolded in my classroom. The first chapter outlines how I arrived at my chosen inquiry and the design of my classroom project. Chapter Two focuses on both my colleagues and me and presents a variety of influences on the selection of literature and activities for use in the classroom. Chapter Three outlines all of the classroom activities the students were engaged in that demonstrated their background knowledge in gender issues. The use of journals, both reader's response journals and metacognitive or learning journals is discussed in Chapter Four. Background is provided on the researchers and teachers who influenced the use of these journals in my classroom. Chapter Five contains the students' initial interpretations, classroom discussions and reflections based on the two short stories selected for the study. Three students provided me with responses to the questionnaires, extending my understanding of gender issues and their opinions on them, which make up Chapter Six. The final chapter is my attempt to bring forth some of the new understandings I

have after engaging in this project with my students. All of these chapters emerged as the study was completed in my classroom. Chapter One was written as I designed the project. Three months following that, I engaged my students in the classroom project. Then, the next three chapters were written in the months that followed the completion of the thesis project and the school year. After six months of time had passed, the remaining chapters were developed. All of the chapters reflect both my understandings and my students' understandings of the influences of gender in my English language arts classroom.

Interpretation of the Data

When I was first designing the study, I had considered using videotape and voice recording equipment to attempt to capture the subtleties of each lesson delivered during the study. However, I was concerned about how my students would react to a video camera or a voice-recording machine. In a small study I had done three years before, students found the technology very intimidating and they were not able to speak or act as freely as they did without them.

Therefore, I chose to limit the methods of data collection to ones that naturally occur in my classroom. Seeing this study as a mix of action research and autobiography, I wanted to make sure that nothing out of the ordinary influenced what I learned about my own teacher practice and about the young people who made up the English students in my room. The students' response journal entries, metacognitive journal entries, jottings of notes, and creation of things like collages and lists were all natural activities they felt comfortable with and were not in any way alien. I felt that I would get a truer set of responses that were not influenced by any outside factors.

I also realized that this method of data collection holds some drawbacks. I have only the notes and artifacts of the students, the personal notes I took, and my memory when interpreting what happened in my classroom and how those happenings relate to the questions I posed in the study. As well, many changes occurred from the lessons as planned to the lessons as delivered, which is what often happens in a dynamic classroom, and I needed to make careful note of those as the study progressed. I also wanted to take some time to reflect on not just the nature of the changes, but on reasons why they occurred in light of the research questions I posed.

Whose Voices Should be Heard?

Another major concern I had about the organization of this document, centred on the idea of whose voices should be represented within the text. As a researcher, I certainly wanted to have the voices of educational theorists and researchers within the pages of my study, informing and supporting the things I saw happening in my classroom. However, I wanted to truly bring to life my English 20 classroom and the students within it. The classroom is a dynamic, exciting, fun place to be, and I wanted to be sure that my account of the happenings, both the expected and unexpected, positive and negative, were strongly represented through the voices of both me and my students who worked and played hard together each day.

In McGregor's (1997) thesis, she discusses some of the concerns that she had as a researcher attempting to capture the voice of her participants. She worried about summarizing the interview subject's responses accurately, and whether they were used in the context in which they were intended. She was also concerned about "imposing another layer of interpretation on the participants' words, created when adding other writers' and teacher-researchers' voices which affirmed or contradicted the participants' views" (p. 16).

McGregor (1997) felt that the best way to deal with her concerns was to incorporate a large number of direct quotations when sharing her interview subjects' responses. I too have used as many direct quotes as I could, taken from the students' response journals, student created artifacts, and metacognitive journals. As well, I have filled the pages with a great deal of my own personal story of my classroom and the fascinating and not so fascinating things that occurred during the ten days of my data collection. I do believe it is important to be aware of the theories and research of the area experts, however, I wanted to make sure that the voices of myself and my students were not lost within the published and recognized ideas of other teachers and researchers.

Chapter 2
Criteria for Selecting Literature and Classroom Activities

I did not make any decision to do this; it was just what I did.

Alice Munro

Taking part in this particular study has given me an opportunity to look deeper into the literature I select and the activities I use than I probably would have otherwise. I know for myself that I sometimes just reach into the files or the binders and grab what is there. The students read the story I have selected and engage in the activities. I do many of the traditional activities such as essay, story and poetry writing, questions and answers, oral presentations and exams. I also tend to step out on what I see as the fringe at times and do activities such as vocal interpretations, tableau representations, collage and collaborative writing/reading. Now that time has passed and I have a family and commitments outside of the classroom, I do find it somewhat easier to rely on what has worked best in the past. Yes, in the beginning of my career, being the idealist I was, I lived to teach. Now I like to think that I teach to live and to dream, with those I love the most.

Looking back and asking myself what factors play a role in my decision making is a difficult task. Why do I select the stories I have over the past eight years? Why do I choose the activities I have and attached them to the specific stories?

I asked three of my colleagues to share their thoughts on these two questions as well, expanding them into areas of influence, hoping that their reflections would help me gain an understanding of what influences English teachers and their decision making process in the classroom. The correspondence that occurred between my colleagues and me was all via email. Two of the teachers who shared their ideas with me are male and one is female. One of the female colleagues who agreed to be a part of this study never actually submitted any responses to my email correspondence, so her voice is absent.

The Influence of Personal Tastes

As a teacher, I think it is honest to say that I get into the groove of teaching. I select the tried and true pieces that fit the themes I have worked and developed over time and continue to use the same types of activities that have demonstrated consistent student engagement and success. I have always had a great deal of success with classroom discussions on the short story "Day of the Butterfly" by Alice Munro and "Thus I Refute Beelzy" by John Collier, and can not imagine leaving them out of a short story unit for English 20. For my English 10 students, the short story "Anointed With Oils"by Alden Nowlan has been the best short story to help me teach my students to write their first literary essay, which explores how the author creates sympathy for the protagonist. Personally, the success of the assignment or activity certainly plays a role in my selection of the repeated use of short stories. However, what makes me want to teach the short story for the first time?

Specifically, I know that stories which are grounded in real life experience are the ones I tend to gravitate to as a reader. I love to read what I class as "coming of age" stories, which reflect my needs, desires, concerns, hopes and dreams. As a teen, I was immersed in the teen romance genre. As an adult, I enjoy novels such as Maeve Binchy's *Circle of Friends,* which explores a girl's reflection on her life and provides some glimpses into the future. I also enjoy pieces that are not predictable – ones that keep me reading to discover more about the characters or conflicts or exotic locales, especially Africa. Bryce Courtney's works, which include, *The Power of One* and *Tommo and Hawk* are ones I have indulged in more than once.

Seeing this as my personal bias towards story, I know that my decisions as to what to use in the classroom must be affected by this and Schweickart (1986) supports my theory. He describes what he calls androcentric modes of reading and the canon, quoting Kolodny (1980) who states that "Insofar as literature is itself a social institution, so, too, reading is a highly socialized – or learned – activity....We read well, and with pleasure, what we already know how to read; and what we know how to read is to a large extent dependent on what we have already read...What we then choose to read – and, by extension, teach and thereby 'canonize" – usually follows upon our previous reading" (45). As Kolodny (1980) identifies, the majority of the stories I enjoy teaching for their literary merit as well as their story power more closely reflect the personal reading interests I have. Stories such as: "Day of the

Butterfly", "A Secret Lost in the Water", "Anointed With Oils", "A Trip for Mrs. Taylor", "The Red Dress,1949", "Invitations", "Boys and Girls", "To Set Our House in Order", "The Broken Globe", "Horses of the Night", "Miss Brill", "The Lottery" and "The Happy Event", contain mostly female protagonists and deal with often difficult questions or issues about life in a more realistic and emotional sense. They have influence over me because of the messages I see in them that speak to me and I know my general teaching style becomes more passionate and engaged when I feel that connected to a piece of literature. I want the short stories I select to have power over my students too. I want students to consider re-reading the text because they enjoyed it or could find some strong personal connection to it, keeping them bound to the text for some time. Hamlin (1982) describes a vision of reading as personality development, focussed on the individual. As well, he also believes that there is a great emphasis on helping students understand and empathize with the feelings of others and to enjoy reading just for the sake of reading. These are wonderful characteristics to describe the purposes behind any reading program. However, is that what was truly happening when I offered my students reading opportunities?

I am not a real fan of fantasy or science fiction, although I do try to include it, having taught the novels *The Hobbit, 1984,* and the short stories "Thus I Refute Beelzy" by John Collier and "The Rockinghorse Winner" by D.H. Lawrence. I am not a real fan of war stories either, but have also included them in novel studies of *The Wars* by Timothy Findley, the modern drama *Billy Bishop Goes to War* by John Gray and Eric Peterson, and the short story "The Sniper" by Liam O'Flaherty. However, I know these are somewhat token inclusions. I like the stories for their literary strengths more so than for their actual story line. Plus, I have designed activities around them that bring out their literary strengths and teach students about the craft of writing.

Now, I am not naïve to think that this is a daunting task. With all of the individuals present in my classroom over the years, I know that selecting literature to use each day that the students become hooked on is virtually impossible. Each year I hear how certain students hated "Day of the Butterfly" and could see no point to studying it or how *Billy Bishop Goes to War* was the best play they had ever read. I guess that is why I have always included this simple objective in my course outline for all my students each year – to find one piece of literature they thoroughly enjoy.

When asked about the influence of his personal tastes, one of my colleagues, Evan, says that he "is more likely to use the thematic approach with his grade 10 and

11 students than with his 12s." He picks "literature concerning a young protagonist or [literature that is] related from the perspective of a young person." Literature that "is less fanciful, having almost an autobiographical nature or having a clearly discernable connection to the real world" is also crucial for his selection process. Evan also expressed that the concept of impact is very important when selecting literature. Stories that have a "high impact, either emotional or mental, on the reader," tend to be chosen more often as he believes that "students often need to be jarred out of the conventional." He agrees that realism is important as he likes "literature that might be considered to be an insightful perspective of the human condition" and also considers timeliness as a key factor – he is "pleased when he can find literature that bears an uncanny resemblance to something in the present".

Another colleague, Andrea, opens her comments to me by saying that if she likes a story she teaches it. If she doesn't like it she doesn't teach it. She does say that there is one exception to this rule. She continues to teach "The Wall" by J.P. Sartre, "even though [she finds] it too disturbing…students have responded well." It is important to her that the stories she chooses are excellent and get a strong response from her students. She does agree that her "personal taste does figure the most though" as she has been "reading book reviews that say Mavis Gallant, or Matt Cohen, or Norman Levine, are great writers" but she still chooses "Alice Munro because [she likes] her short stories." To summarize, she states that there are three influences that affect her decision as to what stories to choose for classroom study: personal taste, literary merit, and country of origin.

I have to admit that the country of origin is not something I have ever considered in the past as criteria for selecting literature. I am sure this has something more to do with the very small farming community I teach in, which sees very few if any international students whose cultural needs I would be compelled to address in the English classroom. I guess the more important question would be, then how do I meet the needs of the rural students? Do I select rurally set stories more so than the ones set in urban environments? Interestingly enough, for this particular study, the two short stories I selected took place in small rural surroundings.

Mark, a colleague I met during my work on the new Senior High English Language Arts program of studies, who teaches in a large urban centre in Alberta, opened his response to my question about personal tastes by saying it was a "tough question." Foremost, he seems to choose what he is familiar with. He chooses

"stories that enable [him] to teach as full a compliment of concepts related to the short story unit." He wants to ensure that he selects a story that will "teach/review elements of plot/conflict, another to focus on character, others for setting, theme, [and] point of view." However, he qualifies these criteria by saying that "at the same time I choose, I am fully conscious of the necessity of appealing to all students in my class – male and female, Canadian and ethnic." He goes on to share that with his English 30 students, another consideration comes into play. He chooses a year long theme and wants to ensure that when selecting stories, there is "a balance there in terms of voices."

The Influence of the Textbook Resources

I remember my first year teaching high school English. I went to the school in early July and picked up copies of each of the textbooks the school had traditionally used for the English courses I was assigned to teach. I grabbed copies of *Man the Mythmaker* and *Sunlight and Shadows* for English 10, *Prose for Discussion* for English 20, *Story and Structure* for English 30 and the *Connections* series, first edition and second editions for the English 13-33 courses. I also took a look in the back room of the library to see what novels and plays were also available for the courses. Titles such as *To Kill a Mockingbird, Lord of the Flies, 1984, Of Mice and Men, Death of a Salesman, The Glass Menagerie, Our Town, and Doll's House* were the ones I remember taking from the shelves, being familiar with fewer than half of them at the time.

Over the next few weeks of planning, I did use the textbooks, as a guide for what to teach, but was never completely satisfied with each anthology's themes, selections or suggested activities. In order to impress the powers that were, and to ensure I had a job next year, I gravitated towards teaching by genre, and the variety of textbooks available to me seemed to support that notion. I also found myself going into collections I had at home and selections I had used during student teaching, supplementing my ideas. I found myself thinking back to my days as a high school English student, remembering the stories I loved the most and the ones I understood well.

Then, once the year began, new textbooks arrived, which opened up even more doors of possibility. I remember breathing a sigh of both relief and frustration when

the new *Literary Experiences I* came into our school as I had worked through that text as a practicum student and had unit outlines and ideas already created and stored away. It meant I could for the most part stop using the antiquated *Prose for Discussion* as my primary text, which was causing me a great deal of lesson delivery grief as the students' engagement with the variety of texts was inconsistent at best. Plus, it was the text I used as an English 20 student, and I guess I couldn't believe that things hadn't changed yet. However, it did pose a problem as it was organized thematically, which made more work for me to try to separate the literature pieces within each theme and adapt them to my genre unit plans.

I also remember using a broader definition of text that first year, bringing in old television dramas such as "Little House on the Prairie" to teach short story structure. I also brought in music for students to listen to and interpret as well as write along with. I remember receiving some great poetry from "Für Elise" by Beethoven and some of the best short story pieces from a song called "Promises" by Frozen Ghost, a popular pop band.

Over the years at my school, there have been very few changes to the anthologies used to teach the short story unit at any of the levels English 10/13-30/33. Just last year, I received *Literary Experiences II* for the English 30/33 split class I taught, which is the first new textbook I have had to work with in the past eight years. I still relied heavily on the old textbook material I had adapted to suit my teaching style and the perceived student needs, realizing it would take time to integrate or abandon some of the old and create some of the new. The new English 10-1 pilot has also seen an infusion of new text material, and I am facing the same inability to dive right in and use it, having had it for almost two full months in the classroom before I even asked the students to open it.

Overall, I would have to say that the available resources certainly provide me with choices of stories to teach, but do not restrict me to teach certain pieces. There is a great deal of choice within them and there are ones I have personally liked, or found to be strong examples of some literary technique I wish to teach, and have adapted them into my units. I also find that I am not restricted to just the single textbook that my students are given through book rental procedures, as I rely quite heavily on older texts, support anthologies and even texts available from other courses not being taught that semester to gather short stories for instruction. I guess that is the advantage of

being the only English teacher in the school – I don't have to worry about stepping on the toes of any other instructor in the school when it comes to the literature I select.

When I asked Evan if available resources influence his choices for short stories in his classroom, he emphatically stated that they don't. He states that "there is far more good literature available than [he] can possibly get into a semester." He does note that because of time constraints, he "can only introduce so much 'new literature' to [his] classes in a given year and for the remainder [he] must draw on proven pieces [he] has used in the past. These proven pieces are the ones "which [he has] developed or collected related teaching and evaluation materials." Sometimes a part of his "decision in selecting titles is the fact that the other teachers don't use the title and therefore [he] needn't worry about the books being out of the bookroom when [he] goes to get them." He also doesn't have to worry about "someone being concerned if [he hasn't] returned them in a given time."

Andrea simply stated that available resources "don't influence [her] decision making." She does indicate that she does "stick to stories in approved text," but that the other factors, such as personal taste, literary merit and country of origin influence her choices within the approved texts.

Mark had a similar response to Andrea, indicating that his department "budget affords whatever books [they] choose to purchase and use." Therefore, money, department-related issues or availability of resources has never been a problem at his school. He seems to see his large department as having an advantage since there are fourteen teachers who use "a variety of resources."

The Influence of Change to the Tried and True

I cannot say that there has never been change within the units I teach. When our library can afford it, receiving newly authorized resources, such as the new pilot materials for English 10-1 or the new *Literary Experiences II* anthology, or even support resources do provide new ideas for literature study and activities. Often, a class will react in a negative way to a piece of literature, giving me a chance to review and reflect on its use in my classroom, and I either make changes or consider a whole new piece for next year's class. There have even been occasions when the piece of literature does not seem to engage the students in the beginning, but the activities they complete reflect enthusiasm and insightful learning. I have even chosen a short story,

for example, to teach at the English 10 level and then, in two years time, presented the exact same short story to the same group of students for a second look. Doing this gives students an opportunity to realize that there are many factors that can influence a reading and interpretation of a selection, and time and maturity of thought are two of them.

I know I find it much easier to select a new novel, Shakespearean play, or modern drama rather than trying to find a new short story, poem or essay. When the pieces are longer, and must have more classroom time devoted to their study, if I get bored or desire a change, I find it easier to make that change with these longer pieces. Sometimes I do add in a few new pieces of poetry or short story selections, perhaps even a different essay or myth, but there are the ones I have decided, according to my personal values and beliefs as an educator, that are the must-be-taught selections. I am certainly less open to change when considering shorter literature selections. I like their compactness – their teachable, impact laden moments and never seem to tire of them, as students reveal new insights and take new risks each year.

I have consistently taught English 10 each year of my career and have made many changes during the evolution of the course. I started teaching the course by genre, then moved to a combination of genre and theme and will be trying this fall to teach English 10-1 under one large theme, integrating all pieces and genres into it. Purves, Rogers and Soter (1990) indicate that to stop reading is the curse of the English teacher and is just the beginning of the teacher's mental decay. I think I intrinsically believe in their ideas. However, no matter how many good literature choices the new pilot texts offer for the new English Language Arts 10-1 program, I will continue to integrate the pieces from the older anthologies that I feel fit my perceptions of good literature encounters for students at that grade level. These are the same selections that have engaged my students and facilitated learning in my classroom for the past eight years—I could not abandon them.

Looking at the development of my units from year one to year eight, there have been many changes made, and many pieces and activities maintained. Change is part of professional growth but full-scale change is too time-consuming and too risky for students as you end up relying on all new literature and all new activities with little history or validity. Teachers need time to evaluate changes, and that is why small, subtle changes, over time are more effective than big changes done quickly.

Evan tends to agree with me, believing that "units experience more of an evolution than a change." He clarifies his statement by saying "over the course of a few years they change dramatically although the change may not be apparent from one year to the next. Change is generally the result of wanting to add to a unit, not realizing that it will probably necessitate the need to delete from the unit in other places."

Andrea talks mostly of what happens when she gets tired of teaching a story. Sometimes she gets "tired of trying to convince students it's good literature or working hard to establish context for them." She does "come back to stories too…[leaving] something out for a few years, then [reviving] it." She tries to "change one or two of six or seven stories per semester or per year, depending on how many classes [she] has" for two reasons. One is plagiarism and the other is her personal interest. She doesn't "want to teach a story four times in a year, if [she has] two of the same classes each semester."

Mark indicates that he makes changes to his units "very often." He says that he tries "to teach at least one new story with every study." With the availability of resources, I can see how he could accomplish this much easier than I could. He goes on to say that he "only deals directly with about seven or eight stories so within a few years, many of the stories have been changed. Most of [his] changes involve stories that help to address the need to encounter various gender and ethnic voices." Again, in my situation, not experiencing a change of students each year, I guess my changes are subtle. They would more than likely reflect the perceived interests of the students as I grow to know them throughout their English career.

The Influence of Special Interest Groups

I realized early in my teaching career that I was not the only one in the classroom being influenced in some way by the literature that I chose to teach. In my second year, I had a parent who was very concerned about her son studying the short story "The Mysterious Stranger" by Mark Twain. The family's religious background was making it very difficult for this young man and his parents to separate the literature from their personal beliefs. She requested that he be removed from any assignment expectations surrounding this piece of literature and I agreed, finding an alternate assignment for him. I did attempt to share my personal perceptions about the

validity of the short story with the concerned parent, but she was very closed to my explanations so I took the issue no further. I have not dropped this particular story from my mythology/archetype unit even though this scenario has repeated itself four times, with the parents and students having a similar reaction, making the exact same exemption request. It is certainly through this experience that I have come to realize that there are many other groups of people who could either attempt to or directly influence the decision making process in an English teacher's classroom.

Out of all the special groups that could wage some influence in my classroom – parents, students, school boards, administration, and other teachers – I believe that the students and my colleagues have had some of the greatest influence on me personally. I have always had a supportive principal, who has left me to teach what I perceive to be the best literature for the students. Even during the parental uproar with "The Mysterious Stranger" the principal supported my decision to defend my choice with the parents, and then create an alternative assignment for each of the students who requested one. Not once did he request I discontinue teaching it or question my judgement. Other than approving texts and alternative novel choices, the school board has also not played an influential role in my classroom decisions.

Students have certainly played the largest role in influencing my decisions. All of them attempt to tell me how much the stories we have studied "suck" and I heard that often during my short story unit with the English 20s. I realize that the "sucks" reaction is an initial one, and once they have studied the story they can agree it has literary merit, they are reacting personally to a story rather than as a literary critic. This does raise an issue though. If a student doesn't like a story, will the reading and analyzing of it become a learning experience or a frustrating experience? If I don't teach a story I don't personally like, should they be forced to study stories they don't like? Life in the English classroom is not that simple.

Should it be up to me to find strong stories that all of them like? Of course not. And not all of them are going to be able to make the judgement of what literature is good and what literature is bad. I take it into account when a certain group in the classroom doesn't like a story, but tend to change the activities rather than the literature. I like the challenge of figuring out ways to engage students in stories in a variety of ways, especially when that story has received lukewarm reviews in the past. The short story used for half of this study, "Boys and Girls" has received lukewarm reviews in some past classes and rave reviews in others. I find what makes the

difference is the representation and discussion assignments I have developed in the past. Students love to pick apart and criticize the merits of the short film version, shocked at some of the decisions made by the director that do not seem to hint at the author's intended purpose. I also tend to get some of the best classroom discussions surrounding the roles of boys and girls, which are far superior to any other piece of literature for that entire semester. Just because the students find the story long and somewhat slow on first read, I have refused to abandon it, integrating activities that engage the students in the story, showing them its strengths and merit. It is a practice I am not about to change.

Evan acknowledges that student acceptance influences the choices he makes in his classroom. "The 'read it 'cause it's good for you' approach can only be taken so far. In truth, if by the end of a study of a piece of literature students, in general, haven't come round to a grudging admiration of the work, it probably isn't worth repeating with another class." As well, "obscure pieces of literature students write well about on the diploma exams" is something that Evan goes in search of and also introduces to his students.

Andrea, who sees interest groups, as the ones who will get upset at the choices made by teachers, does not feel they influence her decisions at all as she sticks with approved texts. She states that "the only way students influence [her] is by the way they receive or respond to a story – if they really like it, if they really don't like it."

Other teachers also have a great deal of influence on me. Just recently, a colleague asked me if I knew the author of a short story called "The Moose and the Sparrow". Not having heard of it before, I did a search on the internet and discovered the author was Hugh Garner, a Canadian. Intrigued as to the content of the short story, I read some of the information provided on the various websites and decided to track the short story down and consider using it this semester with my English 10-1 students.

Feeling somewhat isolated in a small school where I am the only high school English teacher, I constantly ask other teachers what they are doing and consider their ideas. I remember when I was student teaching I made a comment in the teacher workroom about not knowing which novel to teach a group of English 23 students. Immediately, five of the English teachers in the department starting throwing out titles to me, offering their units and evaluation packages. I know I miss that kind of collaboration in my smaller school, even though I spend probably more time adapting

the idea to fit my teaching style and my students' learning styles than I would if I started from scratch. I like the testimonials, and sense of validity that is provided through teacher recommendation.

Evan recognizes the contributions of his colleagues as well, noting how valuable they can be, "especially if they are willing to share resources they have collected."

Andrea believes that "professional dialogue has the most influence of anything." She goes on to share an anecdote about being at a workshop with a colleague, a fellow English teacher from another school. They "went out for a walk at noon, and talk turned to what [their] kids were doing that day with the sub. His students were reading "The Guest" by Albert Camus, and [Andrea] mentioned that [she] didn't know it well enough to teach it. During the walk – in a sort of wilderness area through drifts of snow, walking in single file – he told [her] the narrative, and then the specific points which he highlights – the notion of existentialism and the absurdity of it, whether or not the man has choice, why Daru is so hospitable to the Arab." Then, when they returned to the meeting, he drew a mind map for her, which she still has and looks at every time she teaches the story. Even though the event happened "at least five years ago, probably more…it is very [clear] in her mind – walking along behind him in the snow, listening to him tell the story." Andrea admits to having taught that story at least once each semester since.

Mark's response to the concerns of special interests groups was the shortest response. He focussed mostly on the influence of parents and students when he replied that "parents trust our choices and very seldom express an opinion" about what is being taught in the classroom. As well, Mark addresses student concerns by allowing his "students a choice of stories for independent study."

The Influences Beyond the Walls of the Classroom

Professional conferences, workshops, curriculum groups, diploma exam marking sessions and technology changes are all factors that have influenced my decision making in the past and will not doubt continue influencing my choices in the future. The colleagues you encounter and the discussions that take place, learning about new or old literature pieces and a variety of different teaching strategies and activities surrounding them is invigorating and exhilarating for me personally.

I have attended ELAC (English Language Arts Council) conferences six out of the eight years of my teaching career. I love escaping to the exotic locales, but more than anything I like the enthusiasm with which I return to my classroom in early May, a time of burn out and dried up creativity, and try some of the new activities I have been introduced to. I remember the first conference I went to and most of the sessions I attended. One in particular focussed on visual essays, a concept which was I was unfamiliar with. The presenter used them in her short story unit as students had a choice as to how they wished to represent their thesis and support it visually. I adapted the idea and introduced the activity to my English 30 students for their *1984* novel study. It was a great success. The students embraced the activity and presented their understanding of the novel in ways I do not believe a traditional essay could have. I have adapted this project and used it successfully in all my English classes, grades 9-12, within a variety of genres from poetry to Shakespeare.

I even remember one conference, which I attended by myself and knew no one, where I literally sat near groups of teachers and listened in on their conversations, jotting down literature titles they shared and activities they described. One teacher talked about a project where her students researched and prepared an authentic Alabama dinner meal, tying this in to *To Kill a Mockingbird.* Another teacher shared her success in having students create the recipes found in the back of the novel *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Café.*

Diploma examination marking sessions are somewhat humbling for me as they remind me how much literature I am unfamiliar with and how I am somewhat closed to changing some of my tried and true pieces. I always jot down the names of novel titles that show up in the exams. I also try to take note of the stories the students use and attempt to track them down, especially if the synopsis provided by the student catches my interest or if the student writes about it in an enthusiastic fashion.

Working on the new Senior High English Language Arts curriculum document for Alberta was certainly the professional experience of a lifetime. The ability to work with teachers from all over the province for two years opened up my eyes to a variety of new teaching and learning strategies. I realized the importance of metacognition, the use of reader's response and the successful integration of technology, which I certainly had shied away from because of my limited knowledge. I have received numerous copies of successful activities from the teachers I have met and we constantly shared titles of stories we loved to teach and were successful with our

students. One of my colleagues talked enthusiastically about the success of the short story "The Dancing Bear" by Guy Vanderhaghe and I have decided to introduce it to my English 30s to see what they think of this short story and their encounter with it. Another colleague talked about a contract unit for the novel *Jurassic Park* she has had great success with and after adapting it, found it to be an excellent independent project for my English 9 students to complete for their final book project.

When asked about influences outside of the classroom, Evan also singles out the diploma examination marking process. It is here that he likes to start "a list when marking of unfamiliar literature titles [he] hears teachers at his table discussing and often other pieces of literature they relate to or might be used in conjunction with."

Technology also plays a big role in the availability of teacher-shared ideas and resources. Evan indicates that "teachers today often forward material they find useful to each other via email, which prompts one to consider more closely a title that might otherwise received a passing mention."

Another factor that Evan indicates that directly influences his choices is the availability and quality of film versions. "The fact that a text has been made into a movie is often a major reason one title is selected over another in some classes. [He] often personally [dislikes] showing the film version of a text unless [his class is] in a film study mode. However, [he does] like to find a film that is similar in some respect for comparison or to provide another perspective to a theme.

As well as dialogue directly from colleagues, Andrea states that her professional reading also influences her in important ways. She remembers "reading an article in which the teacher had transcribed students' discussion of James Joyce's "Eveline". Again, [she remembers] huge chunks of what those students said and [she has] taught that story every semester since."

Andrea's masters work influenced her in many ways as well. She has "tried to have more fun in [her] classroom with the literature" since she has returned from her sabbatical and the writing of her thesis. She has "tried to focus on [her] ultimate goal – enjoyment of literature – and allow that to dictate choice." She shares an example of selecting five or six poems and having the students get into groups according to the poem they chose after reading them all, discussing it, and completing a formal presentation to the class. "It took a double period" she states, but it "was one of the best activities" she thinks she has done. She also chose to teach *Twelfth Night* by Shakespeare to her English 20s "rather than *Macbeth* because [she] thought they

should do a comedy, and because [she doesn't] find teaching *Macbeth* fun." She had the students begin the study by breaking them into groups and "giving them scenarios which were like scenes they would encounter in the play" and then having groups present "short sketches in which the scenarios were played out." She jokingly chides that one of her students is still referred to as "Smelly Jarry because of the scenario he was in."

Andrea goes on to say that she depends "a lot on outside sources for influence" finding herself in teaching situations with teachers who are reluctant to change or new ways of doing things in the classroom. Andrea appears to be very professionally driven, reading professional journals, attending ELAC and local workshops, and the Professional Development Consortium. She says that she seeks "colleagues who think like [she] does, either in the division…through ELAC and University courses, English 30 and 33 marking, and [she volunteers] for provincial committees" meeting the "best teachers in the province…by doing so."

Mark also recognized the significance of professional dialogue. He acknowledges this as a strong influence on his decision making, noting that he often acts upon the suggestions of teachers "especially if supplementary materials (quizzes, activities, etc.) are also shared."

Gender Considerations

I know that I have never really ever taken gender into consideration when I select literature and design activities for my students. I know that the whole notion of gender in selecting literature and creating activities is what drew me towards my research project, especially in reflection of my English 10 course, one which I felt was full of a predominately female voice in the literature.

I also specifically remember the second chance I had to teach English 30. The class had 24 students in it – 20 girls and 4 boys. I remember thinking how unusual the dynamics were, but I still made choices for literature based on other factors. I specifically selected *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen because I had just recently read it and liked the strength of the central character, Nora. I selected *Hamlet* because I wanted a chance to re-teach this unit, not feeling I had done a great job the first time I had tackled it. I selected a new short story I read in a new anthology *Inside Stories for Senior Students* called "Invitations" by Carol Shields. I had just read her novel *The*

Stone Diaries and had fallen in love with her writing style. The short story lived up to its genre – it was short and was full of purposeful imagery and detail selection that I felt would both challenge and extend my students' understanding and appreciation of literature. At no time do I recall saying to myself, "there are only four boys in the class, how am I going to meet their needs?"

In the years that followed this experience, many of the boys began to speak out about their perceptions related to my English classroom. In many cases they felt very unfairly treated and marked, feeling that I had a bias towards the girls in the class. Generally, the girls' marks were higher; however, there were many boys in my classes who also excelled and were at the top of the class. As many negative complaints as there were, there were also positive comments expressed related to the courses. I was told that my courses offered challenges for students and they felt adequately prepared for post-secondary pursuits. I do not feel personally that I have any particular bias towards the way I mark or treat the boys or girls in my classroom, but could the literature I am selecting and the activities I am designing perhaps be causing some of the negative perceptions? An interesting thought.

I asked two of my colleagues, Mark and Andrea, many questions about the gender considerations they make in their classrooms. Their thoughts provide interesting insights and generate many more questions about gender and choices in the classroom.

Mark notes that "as a society, we perhaps have bought into the notion that the 'good' literature (that which is worthy of study and analysis) has been created by the DWEMs (Dead White European-American Males)." This idea was not new to me as the whole issue of the canon and the fact that male writers dominate it was an issue discussed at length in two of my graduate courses. He notes that he is "very conscious of the need to have a balanced curriculum." Now a book does not get published if it does not contain gender equality in terms of authors and protagonists. Mark goes on to acknowledge that the dominance of male voice in the anthologies has been addressed, "but unfortunately the older anthologies – which continue to be used even at my school – contain that gender imbalance." Mark reveals that over half of his English teaching staff is female "and they continue to use the old texts and I would bet money that there is no gender balance in their choices." He then goes on to say that what he finds most interesting in his experience is that "the male teachers pay more attention to addressing gender balances than the female teachers."

Prior to this study, I would have to agree that this particular female certainly did not believe that gender was an important consideration in my classroom choices. I indicated in an email to Mark that "literature is literature and it touches the hearts of all" downplaying the whole notion that gender should be a predominate consideration. He agreed with me, however his concern is that "there are some teachers that use this as a rationalization to perpetuate an archaic canon in their classrooms." Mark noted that he is:

> consciously making a point of including literature (at all levels) that shows positive male role models. This too is sadly lacking in many curricula. So many of our stories and literature feature dysfunctional, unhappy males. There have been so many reports lately about how the school systems are failing our boys. [Alberta Learning] distributed a study, which shows how poorly boys are doing compared to girls. Twice as many girls as boys get 5s in the part A. What is even more shocking is that girls do almost twice as well as boys in the teacher generated mark. Now we can easily dismiss the issue and say that boys are lazy or they have other priorities…but that is avoiding the issue. Perhaps we have designed schools and classrooms that are not that 'boy friendly'.

I then shared with Mark my concern for how the boys in my English classes just never seemed to excel as the girls did. There were strong boys, but not as strong as the girls. They did not seem to have the maturity, voice or commitment to the task of language learning as the girls did. Mark felt that what I was describing was probably the norm in most classrooms. He believes that the whole notion that girls do better than boys has come from the fact that "we have institutionalized a dynamic in the classroom where we have handicapped the boys and favored the girls."

He clarified his ideas:

> One of the reasons for this, of course, lies in the fact that in the classroom we value certain processes and discourage others. The processes we value (and evaluate) are precisely those that the girls by nature and nurture do better at – use language. Girls…are by nature more verbal and they tend to express their emotions more freely and frequently. I am not saying that boys don't or can't do these things. I am just saying that females find it easier to do so. In the

> classroom we stress verbal and written communication. We do not value as much the other intelligences identified by Gardner. Look at the diploma exam. The same applies here. All that is really tested is the linguistic ability of students…you and I know that girls have the advantage here. The boys tend to do better when they are on their feet – in presentations, demonstrations and debates. These are not tested and not core in most classrooms. The point that I am trying to make is that WE have set up our classroom dynamics in such a way as to ensure that boys will not do as well as the girls. It has little to do with whether or not there is a gender balance of writers and protagonists in the literature studied.

This last comment I found very intriguing. From the beginning of my project I had always thought that the lack of gender balance in my literature selections may be having a negative impact on my students. According to Mark, it is more the way I design my classroom activities and set up my classroom daily that is impacting my students. My work with the new curriculum, which broadens the definition of text and broadens the text creation and encounter opportunities perhaps is a strong step forward in creating a classroom that is friendly to both genders.

Sommers (2000) in her article for *The Atlantic Monthly* entitled "The War Against Boys" tends to agree with Mark's observations about boys, noting that "A review of the facts shows boys, not girls, on the weak side of an education gender gap. The typical boy is a year and half behind the typical girl in reading and writing; he is less committed to school and less likely to go to college." In the same article, Sommers (2000) shares the findings of a survey conducted by Louis Harris and Associates for the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. The survey discovered that "girls appear to have an advantage over boys in terms of their future plans, teachers' expectations, everyday experiences at school and interactions in the classroom." She concludes her article by stating that "A boy today, through no fault of his own, finds himself implicated in the social crime of shortchanging girls….Boys do not need to be rescued from their masculinity. But they are not getting the help they need…We should call for balance, objective information, fair treatment, and a concerted national effort to get boys back on track."

I also shared with Mark my observations about how much girls dominate classroom discussions and how little skill transfer there is between the students'

journals and their ability to write about literature analytically. Mark wonders if this idea of skill transfer from one form of writing to another "is necessarily true and is this justification enough to spend so much time dealing with this in the classroom?" He clarifies his point by stating that he is "NOT saying that looking critically at literature is unimportant. I am saying the exact opposite. The study of and infusion into literature is extremely important. Nothing could be more important in the development of young individuals. Literature tells us who we are and what makes us human. Literature assures us that we can be and do anything. Literature reminds us that we have a soul and that the imagination is the most powerful faculty we have. What I am suggesting is that we should perhaps value and evaluate more than just the linguistic-logical processes in the classroom when we deal with literature."

In a discussion about her short story unit, Andrea shared a collaborative experience she had with a male colleague. It was her first time teaching English 20 in ten years and she took the opportunity to enter into some professional dialogue. I noticed when she emailed me her list of literature choices for the unit that she seemed to be providing a strong gender balance of literature. When I asked her if this could be because of the joint planning sessions with a male teacher, she indicated that she "chose the gender balance deliberately, and to give kids the choice of male or female protagonists. The choice between "Wars" and "Red Dress" for instance, was specifically because one story was about a boy and one was about a girl…and that's mostly who read them. Same with "God Is Not a Fish Inspector" – grandfather, and "To Set Our House in Order" – grandmother. I was thinking more about main characters than I was about authors, but I suppose that the female authors I chose wrote about female protagonists." Interestingly, Andrea clarified her collaborative sessions, noting that her and her colleague did not at any time discuss gender as a criteria for selecting literature, but focussed on "thematic fit and good literature" as the main criteria.

As Andrea's students worked through her collaborative unit, she shared some of her experiences. She asked the students why they chose the story they did for their independent reading project. The students "made choices based on [Andrea] telling them that the protagonist was male or female, because they thought they could relate better to same-gender characters."

Andrea also believes that the whole issue of gender in the literature classroom is a different issue at different grades. "In grade 10, I think they're more aware of and

less understanding of gender differences, and the story choices are more boy or girl stories than others…I'm thinking about "First Confession", or "An Ounce of Cure", even *To Kill a Mockingbird.* [*Romeo and Juliet*] too. In English 30 though, they can move beyond male vs. female and discuss male and female, either in terms of similarities and differences or it doesn't matter. English 20 is somewhere between – the defensiveness is still there in the discussion, but there seems to be a greater understanding, moving towards a more mature attitude."

She indicates that she "would discuss gender at any level." She usually studies "Boys and Girls" by Alice Munro at the grade 10 level "and have had great discussions about it, which begin with the gender differences but move towards the larger theme of growing up and maturing and becoming an adult, regardless of gender." She goes on to say that she "wouldn't do an overtly feminist text with high school students. It's too dangerous – you stir up anger and resentment and argument and personal stuff – I've offended a lot of students when I have. The text we looked at was one Stevie Cameron wrote in *The Globe and Mail* after the Montreal massacre. It was very strong. Boys got very defensive and I decided that I didn't want to do that to them." She then shared an interesting anecdote from her last semester's English 30 class. "An interesting thing that happens with "A&P" by John Updike in English 30 is that boys laugh at Sammy and girls find him chauvinist and sexist. This semester, I asked girls what they would be thinking if three guys walked in to a store where they worked – what if it was a female narrator. They were able to be just as sexist."

Chapter 3
Students' Notions of Gender and Gender Issues

A girl was not, as I had supposed, simply what I was; it was what I had to become. It was a definition, always touched with emphasis...
Alice Munro

Besides looking specifically at the issues of gender found within the short stories I selected and the reasons behind why I chose them and the activities that went with them, I also engaged the students in a variety of additional pre-reading activities. I chose these activities, believing they would give them the opportunity to explore their personal understandings of different gender related topics. This is a strategy I have always used to give students a foundation from which they can spring into the literature being studied and see connections to real life ideas and situations. Crawford and Chaffin (1986) call this establishing the students' schemata. Essentially, I wanted to know what the students' background knowledge of gender was and in what ways their background would influence the ideas they shared related to gender. Their background, influencing their gender related schemata, would also come to bear as they reacted to and interpreted the short stories to follow.

Prior to the reading of the first short story, "Boys and Girls" by Alice Munro, I engaged the students in two pre-reading activities. The first activity asked each of them what their definition of gender was, to explore the dictionary definition of gender and to fill in a chart that illustrated qualities and characteristics of both males and females. Then, in same sex groups, the students discussed their definitions and charts and then used the discussion and information on their brainstorming sheets to create a visual representation of the qualities and characteristics of males and females. Purves, Rogers and Soter (1990) believe that visuals are a third method of representing ideas in a way that is metaphoric, allowing students to respond to an idea in a way they might not be able to through speaking or writing. The representations created by the student groups were shared orally in class and a recorder was responsible for documenting the process and the discussion each group underwent to create the representation.

The second activity included an oral reading of the short story, "X" by Lois Gould. The students were asked to create what Probst (1982) calls a spontaneous

response. This response simply asks them to take five to ten minutes to jot down their first response to the piece of literature, writing about any aspect of the text that has an impression on them. They were then asked to begin a class discussion that began with their responses and moved into the idea of gender identity, socialization, and expectations of males and females. Then the students were given a chart that asked them to describe expectations for both males and females, both then and now. Students shared their ideas with the large group and I recorded their ideas on large pieces of chart paper, which remained on display during the project.

Then, prior to the reading of the short story "Butcher Bird" by Wallace Stegner, students engaged in two pre-reading activities. The first activity asked the students to describe, in a chart, what they believed the best part of being male and female was. They were also asked to provide a definition and examples of gender stereotyping. The students shared their perceptions with the large group and a discussion of gender stereotyping followed.

The second activity asked the students to complete a statement that asked them about issues of gender that concerned them the most. Then, they were given a questionnaire containing eight questions and were asked to respond in their metacognitive or learning journals to at least four of the questions of their choice. The questions gave them an opportunity to discuss their opinions on issues of gender inside and outside of school. Pace and Townsend (1999) recognize that grouping students in a variety of ways in order to talk about stereotypes is one way to deepen their thinking and increase participation. Through all of these gender-related activities I was certainly hoping create active, thinking participants.

The rest of the activities used during the study directly related to the study of the two short stories and will be discussed later in the document.

What is Gender?

Prior to the study of the short story, "Boys and Girls" by Alice Munro, the first part of pre-reading activity one asked the students to provide their definition of gender. I asked the students to think of their own personal definition and only consult the dictionary once they had written down their ideas. Space on a handout was provided for both their definition and the dictionary definition.

The most common definition provided by both the boys and the girls was that "gender is what classifies males or females." Interestingly enough, about half of the class was enrolled in Biology 30, a class they went to after English, which seemed to help give them some background to deal with the task. One boy, Mac, noted in his journal that one of his same sex group members "devised his [definition] from the biology definition." The boy who did this, Kurt, remarked in his metacognitive journal that his definition of gender had been "scrapped by [his] other group members, mainly because it was 'too scientific' as they said."

All of the boys gave just somewhat simple, modified versions of this definition, while some of the girls attempted to clarify this initial idea, by adding supporting statements. Some variations of the definition were: "the difference between two different sexes (male and female) and how they show their differences," "it is what separates the human race into two groups," and "two different people with different characteristics, needs and wants."

Qualities and Characteristics of Females

When the girls were asked what qualities and characteristics could be attributed to females, there were many similar ideas presented in their charts. Eight out of ten of the girls stated that girls are emotional. Five out of the ten girls indicated that girls are more talkative or open to discussion. As well, five out of the ten girls indicated that friendships are important to girls. Girls depended on the closeness of their groups or cliques. All of these characteristics are supported by brain research done by Gurian (2001) who notes that "girls process more emotive information than boys…girls' emotional fragility comes from having so many emotive functions that they become overwhelmed by the emotional material" (p. 32). In simple terms, Gurian states that females are more likely to process their emotions and get help from others to talk about it as the stress related to their emotions touches on their verbal skills in the brain.

Six out of the ten girls made comments that related to aspects of appearance. Qualities such as neatness, cleanliness and characteristics such as having a small build, breasts, long hair, as well as wearing makeup and perfume dominated their charts. Interestingly, two of the girls made comments about how girls seem more interested or simply do better in English and one girl even said that girls are less mathematical.

Some interesting individual comments included the idea that girls wear dresses all the time, cook and clean, are kind and caring, can bear children, love to shop and are not aggressive.

The boys' charts contained some interesting similarities. Nine out of the ten boys mentioned that girls are emotional. It is interesting to note that the overwhelming agreement that seems to exist between the boys' and girls' perceptions regarding the emotional qualities of females is one that is clearly acknowledged as being so in Baksh and Martin's (1992) study which examined the gender differences in students' perceptions of school. Seven out of the ten boys also indicated that girls are talkative, although two of them made comments about girls 'gossiping' a lot. Tannen (1990) believes that gossip helps in establishing intimacy, although "the negativity of the term reflects men's interpretations of women's ways of talking" (p. 97) and gossiping is definitely cast in a negative light by males. Six out of the ten boys indicated that girls are characterized by unique aspects of appearance such as a lack of facial hair, an hourglass figure, long hair, a flowery scent, small frame and the fact that they wear dresses and are obsessed with their appearance. The boys did not directly make comments about friendships, but two of the boys talked about the grudges that girls hold towards others. Two of the boys mentioned that girls are much more romantic and only two of them made comments about cooking or cleaning. Some other interesting comments made in the charts included the idea that girls do homework more often, like to confuse men, are complex, moody, caring, nurturing and friendly.

Qualities and Characteristics of Males

When the girls were asked to reflect on the characteristics and qualities of males in their charts, they were able to come up with one more grouping than they did when discussing their own gender. As well many of the groupings were somewhat opposite of what the girls had said about females. Seven out of ten girls indicated that boys were less emotional. Gurian (2001) agrees with the girls, noting that boys can sometimes take hours to process emotively and this "lessor emotive ability makes males more emotionally fragile than we tend to think" (p. 31). According to Gurian, boys hold in their emotions, which can cause them difficulty when trying to learn a concept and deal with their emotions at the same time. Five out of ten girls stated that

boys were much more aggressive. This perception that seems to be substantiated by Baksh and Martin (1992) who conclude in their study of gender perceptions in the school setting that aggressiveness is a trait considered to be more normal in boys than girls.

Four out of ten girls wrote down that they felt boys were less talkative. Gurian (2001) supports the girls' comment noting that "boys tend to rely heavily on nonverbal communication, being innately less able on average to verbalize feelings and responses as quickly as girls" (p. 27). Six out of the ten girls made comments about boys' physical appearance, such as being stronger; taller and macho; grubby; handsome; rugged; having a low, deep voice; short hair; big hands; wide shoulders; facial hair and muscles. Seven out of ten girls used words like cars, trucks and sports to define the characteristics and qualities of boys.

Three girls discussed scholastic aptitude and interest, saying that boys were more mathematical and scientific and received higher marks in social studies. Some of the individual comments in the girls' charts proved to be interesting. Boys had one track minds, were not into romantic, cute or cuddly things; liked gory and action type movies; liked science fiction more than girls; liked dark colors more than light ones; were messier writers and more easily accepted new friends into groups.

The boys' charts also contained one more major group of characteristics and qualities than the ones they had created for females. Eight out of ten boys agreed with the girls that boys are less emotional. Six out of ten boys made comments about how physical appearance separates boys and girls, indicating such qualities as being strong, rugged, big, awkward and unmannered as well as having facial hair and not caring as much about physical appearance. Six out of ten boys made direct comments about male personality, which was absent from the girls' charts. They discussed qualities such as bluntness, honesty, romance, charm, competitiveness, as well as being bold, outgoing, self-centred and unorganized. The boys also agreed with the girls in the area of sports and cars as eight out of ten of them agreed that those specific elements define a male.

No boys made any comments about being aggressive, as the girls did, even though Gurian (2001) states that "Boys are more likely to physically show natural aggression" (p. 27), and not one boy made a comment about school achievement. Baksh and Martin (1992) believe, from their study on perception, that males "appear to be developing an identity which dominance and aggressiveness are far more

common elements than in the case of females" (p. 101). Yet, the boys in my classroom do not see this as a dominant trait they possess. As well, this absence of common traits is interesting as there seems to be a lot more overlap between the girls' and boys' perceptions of females than of males. Does this mean that girls and boys have a better mutual understanding of females than they do of males? And where has this understanding come from?

In my reflective journal, I talked about wandering around the room as the students completed the charts. I noticed that the boys, as individuals, had written far fewer traits in their charts than the girls had. As well, both groups seemed to write more in the column of their opposing gender. I wondered at that time if this was because the students have a stronger stereotyped notion of their counterparts and not a clear picture of their own gender. I shared this observation with my colleague, Andrea, and she suggested that "girls at this age think more about what makes boys tick, than boys think about what makes girls tick. Boys think girls should be more like boys. Not unlike Henry Higgins in *Pygmalion*. Why can't a woman be more like a man?" She concludes with a quote from a male colleague, who states that "he'd never see his brothers, or brothers-in-law, if it wasn't for the wives. Women weave the fabric of society…because they pay more attention to relationships. Men get relationships through women.

Visual Representations of Gender

After the students had discussed their notions of gender and shared their qualities and characteristics of each gender with their same sex group members, I gave them the assignment to create a visual representation. They needed to represent their group's unanimous notions of what is male and what is female. I directed their attention to piles of colored construction paper, tissue paper, pipe cleaners, paint, crayons, felts, pencils, pens, glue and magazines and told them they could use whatever resources they wished to in any way they wanted to.

All of the groups instantly focussed on creating collage, as we had done a great deal of work in the past with this particular medium. I told the students that they could create any type of visual representation that they wanted, not wanting them to limit themselves to the somewhat strict conventions of collage.

All of the three boys' groups started creating the male side of their representation first. When Darren asked the guys why, Sam replied, "because we are guys and we know more." This is the same group that also unanimously rejected a picture that had a female doing a male activity. Interestingly enough, only one of the three female groups actually started with the female side to their representation.

The first boys' group made up of Mac, Kurt, Aaron and Mason shared their visual representation of males to begin their presentation. They talked about sports and Pamela Anderson, indicating their love of both sports and women. Their visual had tools on it and a man with a semi-automatic weapon, indicating their love of those types of movies. They had a picture of a toilet, which they referred to as "the great white goddess." The last two pictures were of the band Spinal Tap and some football players, once again reinforcing their love of specific music and tough sports.

When discussing their representation of females, they shared ideas such as makeup, which women must have. The idea that they must "fight fat" and lose weight was also shared by a headline. There were photos of fashion awards and the slogan "dressing for less" which to the boys meant women bought cheap clothes with their money and expensive clothes with the money of others. The last image they talked about was the largest photo of a woman wearing makeup and high fashion, which they admitted they used to "fill in space."

The second boys' group to share their visuals was made up of Sam, Darren and Ethan. This group began by sharing their female representation, done on pink construction paper, using the expression, "ladies first." The boys used a large picture of medicated facial wash to show that women present themselves well and are clean. There were pictures of the Backstreet Boys and Superman, indicating the girls' dreams for the perfect guy. Pictures of shampoo and makeup were there to show how girls like to look pretty and smell nice. A picture of a furby showed how girls like things that are cute. The last photo they discussed was of the married couple, which they believed showed how girls are much more into commitment – more than men are.

This group's visual representation of males, done on blue construction paper, was full of what they called, "cool stuff." They had a large picture of a dog, man's best friend, who came before a woman in a man's life. There was a barbeque and powerful tools. Darren accompanied this discussion with a classic Tim Allen grunt from the television show *Home Improvement*. There was a picture of wildlife, which is important to males because they can do things like fishing. There were pictures of

junk food, which the boys believed males are prone to eating. The last detail they shared was that they cut all of the pictures out in a jagged fashion, indicating that they don't care about the outside, but it is the inside that counts the most.

Reflections on Gender Qualities and Characteristics

After the students' work on the charts, the visual representations and the sharing of those representations, they were asked to reflect in their metacognitive journals on the activities and their learning processes. In the entries related to these activities, many of the boys and girls recognized immediately that their thinking was embedded in stereotypes of some kind. Nan admitted that "it [was] the totally sexist thing to say women are cooking and cleaning but it came to my mind." Anna "realized that when you are in a single gender group that you tend to have the same ideas and feelings and no idea how the other gender may think about that topic; that is until we have a discussion." Lauren stated, "I wrote things I may not totally believe in but when I think about what a woman or a man looks like or 'should' look like and act like I think of that." Lisa stated it in the clearest terms, noticing that "as we wrote down different things in the female and male sections, I noticed that [males and females] are both stereotyped."

Alison seemed to notice the limitations of stereotypes when she said "that no matter what you say about males and females, there will always be an exception." She also noticed that "more than anything each sex stereotypes themselves more than the other sex." Aaron felt that even after completing the activity, it "shows how little some of us know about the opposite sex." However, the most intriguing comment came from Rachel, who talked about how her group decided to put many baby pictures on their visual "to connect the female and male gender because when we were babies nothing mattered."

Some of the boys and girls also noticed some of the choices made by the groups in creating their visual representations were also very stereotyped. Lauren, in discussing her groups' visual, talked about the choice of blue which "is stereotypical for boys" and how their choice of "a truck shows masculinity…also, instead of cutting out the truck…I ripped it out. This signifies how men (in general) are messy and not as well groomed." Neil talked about his group's choices for the collage, indicating that "for the guy side, we clipped out stereotypical guy stuff." Alison talked about the

choices made by the boys for their visuals where they "put pictures of girls, trucks, beer and tools as their characteristics and talked about them as so cool and 'that's just the way we are" kind of attitude." Kurt found the visual "assignment for females was not that easy because women are not simply makeup and modeling ads, so they are frequently misrepresented in magazines and other media types." Rachel recognized that some of the stereotyped choices focussed mostly on the physical, and came from the medium used to create the visuals, believing that if the students "didn't use magazines, which are very stereotypical, the results would have been different."

Darren's group must have had some interesting discussions during the creation of their visual, as his journal is full of reflective comments about his group's process. He "noticed that it was really easy for us to pick out pictures for the male collage, and it was more difficult to pick pictures for the female collage. When we were working on the male collage, we were picking all of the things we liked or did easily and fast." After choosing all the pictures for the female and male sides of the collage, he came to the conclusion that "females are totally opposite of males" and their collages certainly reflected that notion. The part of the project that interested Darren the most was the idea that they "decided to do the male collage first." He asked his group members what they thought of this observation and he summarized their response by saying "it [was] more interesting."

In my own reflective journal, I jotted down a couple of things that struck me as I took the notes during the sharing of the visuals. One thing that occurred during this discussion was that each same sex grouping took ownership of the collage that matched its gender. When the boys' groups discussed the male sides of their visuals, they used the pronoun, "we" to describe the items on it and how they related to the male gender. The girls' groups did exactly the same thing. This didn't really come as a surprise to me as it makes sense that the girls would see themselves reflected in the female side of the representations and the boys would see themselves reflected in the male side of the representations.

The second thing I noticed was that the boys in general had a great deal of difficulty discussing the images on the female sides of their visuals in ways that weren't heavily laden in stereotype. The boys also used quite a negative, taunting tone when presenting their ideas relating to females. The girls were guilty of this as well, but their presentations did contain some insights about males and females that the boys' presentations were lacking. I asked myself in my journal then, if this lack of

insight hurts the boys' abilities to truly understand a female character's motivation. Or, considering that boys are less verbal, relying more on non-verbal communication, was the oral presentation of the collages an effective activity for the boys? Were they truly able to express the ideas they wished to? Then, looking at the ideas they did share, do the students stereotype each character they read about in literature?

When presenting the male aspects of their visuals the boys were quite hard on themselves. They seemed to enjoy portraying the hard-nosed, testosterone-laden images and ideas, being proud of them and perhaps attempting to get a reaction of support from their male peers and an emotional reaction from their female peers. I remember these presentations being full of playful taunts, with the boys and girls attempting to one-up each other, although no students gave any visual signs of being insulted, nor did they reflect negatively in their metacognitive journals.

Five of the boys and only one of the girls commented on which gender was easier for him or her to brainstorm qualities and characteristics. Lisa found that it was "interesting…that it was easier for me to find things about males than females." The boys had mixed feelings about which gender was easier. Mason "found it very difficult to write down characteristics for females." He was particularly worried about saying something that was offensive, even though it was not. Aaron wrote how "it very interesting that I could find so many qualities for males and not many for females."

Mac seemed to contradict all of the boys' feelings, thinking "it was harder to come up with the males' ones because we were males talking about males. It was much easier to pick out female qualities…because as a male, you look for certain things. Another reason might be that there are more things that males know about themselves that they just don't [talk] about because we don't sit and criticize other males."

Expectations of Males and Females – Then and Now

As both "Boys and Girls" and "Butcher Bird" take place in the past, a time period that is somewhat foreign to the students, I thought it would be important to establish expectations of both genders in this time period, believing this would influence their understanding and appreciation of the literature. I also wanted them to reflect on the changes that have occurred over time by looking at expectations of both

genders today. If gender was going to be a focus for study, I wanted to be sure they had an understanding of what it meant to be male or female both then and now.

To get the students thinking about the whole notion of expectations relating to gender, I read orally the short story "X" by Lois Gould. The story traces a family who chooses to adopt a child whose sex is determined to be an "X." The adoptive parents must follow a specific set of rules to ensure that the child does not, in any way, represent either gender. I chose to do an oral reading, because of the many times that the letter "X" is mentioned and the significance of the repetition. I was concerned that it would be lost on my students if they read on their own. Plus, I wanted to engage them immediately in the whole notion of gender and an entertaining oral read was a route I thought would be successful. I did encourage students to jot down their spontaneous notions as I was reading.

After the oral reading was complete, I asked the students to create a spontaneous response to what they had heard. A brief round table discussion then occurred where the students shared their responses to the story. Once the students began to bring forth some of the key ideas centred on expectations based on gender, I moved them into the next activity. They were asked to consider some of the expectations faced by the male and the female gender both in this time period as well as in the past. A handout was provided which helped students to organize their ideas in chart form.

Individually, the students worked on charts in their research duotangs, brainstorming expectations for each gender, both then and now. I then had the students share their ideas with the large group, initiating a discussion about gender expectations that began by looking at the past then moving to the present. I recorded the students' responses on large chart paper, and kept them hanging on the wall for the remainder of the study. The male students' responses were written in blue and the female students' responses were written in red.

The students had no difficulty filling in the chart paper from top to bottom with expectations for both males and females of the past. Both groups contributed to each chart, however more girls contributed to the expectations of females and more boys contributed to the expectations of males. The chart with the most information provided by the large group was definitely the expectations for females in the past.

In the past, the boys believed that there were many expectations for females. They were expected to "stay at home, raise kids, cook, clean and sew." It was also

expected that "generally, they would be less formally educated." They would wear "long hair or braided hair and dresses." Women had "no social life" except for what was offered by the church. They were "expected to have the meal on the table when the husband got home," and "would often eat after men." They boys also felt that women in that time period were "somewhat sheltered – home-life/church was their centre" except for when they got together with other women. The boys also saw that women were expected to bear "male babies." Last, the boys mentioned that women were expected to be "totally loyal to their husbands and look respectable for their husbands."

The girls believed that women were "expected to fulfill roles left by the men in WWI and WWII." They were "expected to marry young – parents did have some say in who they married." Women were expected to "make lots of babies" and be "well mannered and lady-like." Women were less involved in "extra-curricular activities" unless they were with their husbands. They were involved in "women's groups for socializing, or quilting with other women only." Some women had dowries and were often accompanied by a male escort. The girls felt that the priorities for a woman were "family, house, community and self" in that order. Last, they talked about women being separated from the men through things like "boys' and girls' entrances."

The boys felt that males in the past were expected to be the "breadwinner." They were expected to take part in "military service" and be "patriotic." Men were "leaders in their community" and were the ones "given the education." They would "maintain the household" by fixing things and were in charge of the safety of the family. Men were often "strong, strict father-figures" with "shorter hair" who were only "clean shaven when going out." Men in the past were "encouraged to enter the work force as soon as they could, often leaving school early."

The girls saw men in the past as the ones who "had to work for the family as the primary provider." The men were expected to work on "family farms" and then would inherit that legacy. Men stuck by other men and women stuck with other women – there was "not a lot of communication and bonding" between the two genders. Men were expected to take part in hunting and blood-sports, and those who "owned land had the power to vote and run for office" and were expected to do so.

When the class turned to the expectations for males and females in the present, the discussion turned from enthusiastic input and general agreement to very few ideas generated and lots of arguing. The students seemed to have no difficulty discussing

expectations of the past, but couldn't seem to articulate what society expected of them now. They actually found themselves describing qualities and characteristics of males and females rather than the expectations that surround each gender. The other interesting fact is that the boys dominated the discussion of the present, contributing many more ideas to the charts, while the girls seemed to argue amongst each other and with the boys about the points raised.

The boys felt that today, women were "more educated" and were "more independent – not needing a male to get through life." Women were "still expected to be the primary housekeeper, although duties may be shared." The boys also believe that today, women are expected to "help provide financially or in some other way to the family."

The girls expressed that women of today "don't have to get married/have kids." Women can "work full time if they wish – no expectation exists to stay home or work" as women have more choice now. The girls had the last say on this side of the chart, saying that they felt today, women had "less expectations" which was a reaction to the expectations the boys had expressed earlier in the chart.

When looking at expectations of males today, the boys felt men were "still expected to work" and were "expected to work around the house" and "fix things." Men were responsible for taking "an active role in raising the kids." The boys also felt men were "expected to be educated" as the more education you have, the more "intake for the family." They still saw men as the provider.

The girls only shared two ideas for the present day expectations of men. They felt that work around the house was a "shared responsibility" and men may be expected to work, but today, it could be "an option."

Reflections on Gender Expectations

After the students' work on the expectations charts for both the past and the present, the students were once again asked to reflect in their metacognitive journals on the activity and their learning processes. In the entry related to this activity, only four girls and five boys felt a desire to share some of their reflections or comments relating to gender expectations over the years.

Three of the girls focussed their reflections specifically on issues relating to expectations that surround women. Lauren seemed upset with the notion that women

today have things easier, believing that "women today do not have it easier in life just because we have choice now. Most women make the choice to work full time as well as have a family. You can make a conscious choice to do that but women tend to be the primary housekeepers – and they have no choice but to do that." She also believes that "a lot has changed and for the better!"

Lisa did not like the perceived expectations of males and females. She "thinks that a person, male or female, should do whatever they feel they want to or as much as they can handle. I not like it how we are all stereotyped. I that the expectations in that area are headed in the wrong way…Having more choices for women enables them to make a better life for themselves. Maybe not easier but I think definitely a better one."

Rachel noticed that the class had "more trouble on the 'now' part. On the expectation 'then' we had an easier time on the females. Females had a lot more restrictions then than we do now. Maybe history books focus more on the things females have overcome than males. I think males have made progress, just not as much as females."

One girl, Amy, took the opportunity to express a very passionate opinion about how women should be regarded with a higher degree of worth and respect. She believes that "men think they are superior to women, yet they have and had less expectations than us. Yes, they work hard and bring home food, but never have to clean it, cook it and serve it. They [women] cook everything, clean everything, help out with the farm work, raise the children, not to mention giving birth, and get jobs when not enough money is being earned by the male. We deserve some credit for all that we've done over the years. If men can't see this then they really are blind."

Two of the boys indicated that they saw a reversal of roles and expectations. Neil believed that "there is almost a reversal of roles or a partial one at least." To him anyway, "chicks are given better chances of getting a better education than guys." He discusses an example of "the introduction of all-girl schools. I've heard people say that it will help your daughter's grades, but I've never heard that segregating boys helps their grades. Maybe they aren't given more opportunities than boys but it seems education is more centred around them." Mac seems to agree with Neil, saying that if you "look at the difference, in what the females are expected to do 'now' and the males, what the females were expected to are being passed on to the males. There's almost a reverse trend."

Most of the boys' responses discussed the idea that many expectations of women in the past had become part of the expectations of males now. Mac shared that "when it comes to cook meals I can make some good food on the BBQ. I have no problem with going out and cooking for supper." Mason notes that men are "still expected to work but now we are also expected to help around the house." Aaron agrees, stating that "the only major difference I see in our role is that we are expected to do more outside of work. Like help raise the family and house work."

Kurt had some of the most insightful comments relating to the idea of gender expectations. He stated that:

> Now, no one is really expected to do anything – people have freedom to do what they want, and do not have as many restrictions placed on them. In the past, women were nowhere near being treated as equals, and did not receive much respect. Now that women take part in male activities and vice-versa, it is sorta like "X." It is a worlds-colliding situation, as people have a wide range of things to take part in, and gender sort of losing some meaning. Old literature mainly deals with gender themes, as issues back then were a lot different. Today, society is sorta shaped in the way that every single human being is born with the rights of everyone else, and no one is left out. A lot of people abuse those rights and don't use them wisely. What the activity showed me is that stereotypes and expectations have been slimmed down over the years. In society, both genders are very equal now, so it is interesting how so much gender hatred and sexism appears."

The Best Parts of Being Male and Female

Prior to the study of the short story "Butcher Bird" by Wallace Stegner, the students were asked what they believed was the best part of being male and female. They were asked to record their ideas in a chart, as well as provide a definition of what they believed gender stereotyping was and some examples of gender stereotyping. Their ideas were shared orally in class, allowing each student to share at least one idea from both the male and female sides of their charts.

The sharing of these ideas was very light and somewhat humorous as students seemed to enjoy having the spotlight on their own for a couple of minutes and took

advantage of it to express sometimes very controversial or somewhat negative stereotype laden responses to the prompt. There were lots of giggles and protests as well as deep moans and sighs as the variety of responses were shared.

The most common responses from the girls were they felt that some of the best parts of being male were the fact that males could be lazy. They did not have to deal with a menstrual cycle and were never involved in cat-fights. Males received higher wages, were less concerned about their appearance and could stand up to go to the bathroom which were all seen as advantages.

Some individual comments made by girls that illustrated the best part about being a male were that males are not as stereotyped as girls are and that a male's parents aren't as scared about them all the time. Males can be "jerks" and don't "take silly things to heart." As well, males only take five minutes to get ready, can fight and get away with it and have broader opportunities in the job market.

According to the girls, the best parts of being female were that there were more opportunities open to them than ever before, allowing them to do almost anything they want. They could easily talk and express themselves. Females can shop and have more choices available to them as to what they can buy, especially clothes and shoes.

Some individual comments regarding the best part about being a female was that females make friends more easily and with almost anyone they want. They work less physically challenging jobs, but more mentally challenging jobs than males. Girls can be opinionated, and can be moody and grumpy and have reasons for being so.

According to the boys, the best parts of being male were that they could be lazy, yet do rugged, outdoor and sports related activities and be good at them. They felt it was a real advantage to be able to stand and go to the bathroom, almost anywhere they felt like it. They can fight, and it only takes them about ten minutes to get ready to go anywhere.

Some individual boys commented that the best part about being male was that they didn't have to have children and didn't care what other people thought of them. They are not as high maintenance as females are and care less about shopping for the perfect item – they just buy the first thing that fits or looks good. As well, one boy felt it was a real advantage that he didn't have to talk or express his feelings.

The boys felt that the best parts of being a female were that a larger variety of clothing was available to females. Females are always able to talk and be open and

love to "yap" on the phone. They are organized, are not forced to work, and spend other people's money, mostly their husband's or boyfriend's money.

Individually, some of the boys felt that the best parts of being a female were that they got better grades and cared more about school. Girls can take all morning to get ready, have patience and willpower and can purchase cheaper car insurance.

Reflections on the Best Parts of Being Male and Female

Interestingly enough, only three girls chose to make any reflective comments following this activity in their metacognitive journals. Thinking back, there were so many comments being fired back and forth as the ideas were being shared, I believe the students may have felt they either had their chance to express their ideas or just had nothing else to say on the subject.

The three girls took opportunities to reflect their unhappiness with many of the boys' comments. Ellen felt that "after some of the boys' comments were said that the girls wanted revenge. They thought that we just wanted to spend their money! Whatever. That was the one thing that got me right there." Alison too disagreed with the money spending comment, stating that "Nowadays women bring in a lot of the money and even if they don't I don't see why they are complaining, I don't see them ever asking to go shopping."

Kate said that she could "not believe what the guys actually thought about what the best part of being a women is." She felt that Mac was rude, but later in the response said that "Although what [Mac] said was rather blunt; it was true. I know it because I do it!"

Five of the boys discussed their reflections after this activity and with a much more playful and sometimes apologizing tone. Aaron thought that the comment made about females spending males' money was "very amusing." He also added to the list of best parts of being female, stating that females "manipulate the minds of males." Kurt took the opportunity to share his feelings about the persuasiveness of women. He said that females 'have a gift for weaseling out of certain situations by turning on some kind of charm."

Mason felt that the girls "were not as cruel as the guys were…guys also made most of our comments about money, which I believe are true." He states that a male's role "always was and always will be to rake in the dough." Mason then stated that

even before he is in a dating situation with a girl, "she is in our bank accounts." He also expresses concern for the girls who "had said that they are going to marry for money, divorce the guy, take his money and then marry for love."

Mac felt he was lucky to get "out of English class alive" because of his comments during the class sharing session. He admits to seeing this as the boys' "one chance to really burn the girls" even though he qualifies his controversial statements by saying that he "knows that most of the things…were true because I've seen them happening, like the nagging one." He says that women spend money on clothes, but guys spend money on things for the house – "bigger TV, to watch the game better, a larger fridge to put our beer and food in. Oh no! Even better we would buy one of those lazy-boys with the cooler built into them."

Neil indicated that he "filled out the sheet pretty quickly, except for the part about what is the best part of being female." He admitted that he had "never really thought about that before." He finished his response by saying that he "would never want to be a chick. I mean you guys are really high maintenance."

Gender Issues of Concern for Students

Just prior to the same sex and mixed sex group work on the short story "Butcher Bird," both the boys and girls in the classroom were asked to document some of the gender issues that concerned them the most. They could be ones that came right out of the school environment, or ones that were outside of school that they believed were areas of concern for them personally.

The girls had a great deal to say during this activity, with lots of comments being placed on the handout provided. One of the most common responses from the girls was the issue of wage equity. Three of the girls actually shared the idea that women do not get paid as much as men for the same job, using almost the exact same phrasing. Alison made more of a blanket statement, believing that, "women are still not treated as equally as they should. I think this tends to happen in jobs that people may think suit males better." Rachel actually shared a short anecdote about how Budget Rent-A-Car only hires, "males because [they] think they will do a better job and there will be less distraction if girls didn't work."

Four of the girls expressed concerns over the notions that males are stronger than females and are then better suited to do certain things. Anna felt that females,

"get treated more tender," and both Lisa and Nan stated that men are just stronger and therefore are supposed to be better at things that women are. Ellen was concerned that, "people say a girl can't do something because she is a girl."

Many of the girls expressed the view that there is a belief that women should be in the kitchen, as a housewife, while men should be in the garage and can't cook. Higher car insurance prices for guys as well as guys' superiority in sports was also mentioned

The girls also acknowledged a belief that guys can't show their emotions. Anna stated that she felt that girls were, "thought to be less intelligent" than guys. Amy wrote down the phrase, "girls nag too much," indicating this as a concern.

The boys wrote far less during this activity and had a wider variety of responses. The only idea that was common in more than one response had to do with the workplace. Two boys indicated they were concerned about equal rights in the workplace and the jobs that men and women can do and the specifications of these jobs.

Mason simply wrote two words, "housework" and "cooking." Ethan discussed the idea of guys and their emotions, indicating that it was only okay to cry when your "favorite team loses against worst team in league at Superbowl, Grey Cup or Stanley Cup [or] kicked in the family jewels." Norman expressed concerns about the high prices of car insurance and Sam made the statement, "females still want more freedoms."

Two boys, Mac and Will, shared short anecdotes that expressed their concerns. Mac talked about his sister's experience playing hockey on an all boys' team, describing how "the players have no problem with her. She has been playing with them since she was 3, they think she is just one of the guys. But the coaches don't." Will shared a somewhat ironic scenario, where "women complain about [men] being outside all the time doing work and they stay inside. But if they have to do anything outside they complain."

One of the boys Darren indicated that he was concerned about "having a female teacher, therefore reading female literature."

All of the concerns expressed by the students seem to fall into the categories that are acknowledged by Stover (1992), who lists key issues of concern for adolescents. Communication/interaction, sexuality/intimacy, puberty/body image, peers/friendship, and standing up for oneself/dealing with pressure, and crisis/death

were all topics that my students seem to be concerned about as well. Their concerns have manifested themselves into a variety of different forms as my students looked more specifically at gender related concerns in these areas.

Reflections on Gender Issues of Concern

The students were asked, in their metacognitive learning journals, to reflect on the idea of gender issues inside and outside of school by answering at least four of eight questions I provided for them. The questions were as follows:

1. Is the gender of an author a criterion you use to select literature you read for personal enjoyment? Why or why not.

2. How important is it that the literature you read contains a protagonist who matches your gender? Explain.

3. In what ways does your English course meet your reading preferences? In what ways does it not? Give specific details.

4. What is your opinion on the notion that men and women use different language to communicate their ideas, creating a male way of speaking and a female way of speaking? Do you think this idea is true for writers as well? Defend your answer.

5. Do you believe any of your school courses to be "male" courses or "female" courses? Defend your answers.

6. Describe two teachers who have acted as role models for you in the past. What is it about them that make them a role-model in your eyes?

7. In your past experiences, are there any opportunities you believe you missed out on because of your gender? Explain.

8. Are there any future opportunities you are concerned about missing out on because of your gender? Explain.

Four of the boys did not complete this entry in their journals. The information that follows is based on the ten girls' responses and only seven of the boys' responses.

Six of the seven boys chose to respond to question one. Mason was the only one of the boys who directly and clearly stated that the gender of the author does play a role in his selection of literature. He said that he does "choose male authors when I reads." When looking at a book for personal reading, he grabs "a book where the title jumps out at me and oddly enough most of the time male authors have written the books." He qualifies his comments by acknowledging that "some books that males write don't interest me but almost 90% of the time I choose a book by a male author." Ethan also said that he too finds that when he picks a book to read, "it tends to be by a male author."

The most intriguing comment Mason made is an idea also shared by Mac. Both of the boys do not believe that a female author "would write about things that we are interested in." Mac opened his response to this question by stating that he didn't "think that I used the gender of the author as a criterion" and then agreed with Mason that "there aren't too many women who right about the kind of books, I like to read." He claims to have never "really read a book, of my choice, that was by a female, because they don't write about my interests."

The rest of the boys all agreed that they do not take into consideration the gender of the author when they select stories to read. Neil is most concerned about the quality of the writing, stating that "It really doesn't matter who writes it as long as it's good." Kurt says that he looks for "the title of the literature because it does not matter what the gender of the author is. It is only the quality of the writing that counts." Darren indicated that "if there were two war books side by side to pick from, I wouldn't look for the author but the content."

All of the girls chose to respond to question number one. Following the pattern established by the boys, only one of the girls directly stated that the gender of the author influences her choices. Rachel says that she tends "to be more critical and analyze the story more if it is written by a male author" and believes that this bias "stemmed from a book [she] once read written by a male author that was poorly

written."

The rest of the girls indicated that they do not consider the gender of the author when selecting literature. Three of the girls said that they consider the title and two said they also consider reading the story summary. The common thread with these girls' responses is best summarized by Kate, who said that if "the story is really uninteresting I will quit reading it and look for another appealing title."

Anna and Ellen believe that there isn't a great deal of difference between male and female authors, so they don't see this as a criteria they would use to select reading material. Ellen says that you can "tell a difference between the two, but nothing extraordinary," and Anna indicates that she has "read literature by males and females but I have found when you read through it you barely notice a difference."

Alison talks of a specific example when sharing her opinion on this idea. She is presently reading "*Angela's Ashes* by a male and I didn't think I would like it because the author was a male. I actually like the book a lot so far." She goes on to add that perhaps she "can connect better with books written by females but that doesn't affect me when choosing something to read."

Lauren makes an interesting observation about the gender of an author and the genre they write in, which somewhat connects to the observations of Mason and Mac. She says that if she "is going to read a romance novel of some sorts than I would probably choose a female…because…I feel women know how they would like an ever after fairy tale that makes women want to read it."

In reference to question number two, Johnson and Greenbaum (1982) summarize research indicating students prefer to read about a same sex main character when they are presented a reading choice. Knowing this, I found it interesting that all of the boys chose to respond to question number two. Two of the boys, Kurt and Aaron, indicated that the gender of the protagonist was very important to them. Being male, Kurt felt that the protagonist of the literature he reads should be male "because sometimes the writing is too feminine to be enjoyable for" him. He believes that if the story is "in the point of view of a female protagonist, it might not be a fun read for me because it is not something that I can relate to." Aaron agrees, stating that if "the protagonist is male it is easier to put myself in that place. The activities of the protagonist are also relateable too. If the gender of the protagonist is female I kind of loses interest." Some of the research gathered by Johnson and Greenbaum (1982) indicates when boys lose interest in what they are reading, their comprehension can

suffer more so than it does when girls lose interest.

Darren took a middle ground stance on the question, stating that it was somewhat important what the gender was, but not always. He likes the literature that he is "reading to have a male protagonist because sometimes they seem to fit [my] stories right." Darren says that he is into "action-adventure stories, so I always picture the protagonist as a big muscular rugged guy." However, he went on to talk about how appealing a female protagonist can be in a story. He liked the idea that the presence of a female hero "surprises everyone" and he liked having this element of surprise as "it does not seem like the right role." Those were the stories Darren claimed to like, "ones with surprises."

The remaining boys did not feel that the gender of the protagonist mattered, although two indicated that even though it was of no concern to them, the majority of the stories they seemed to read had male protagonists in them. The others simply stated that the quality of the story was more important, which was also reflected in the answers to question number one. Mac and Mason both agreed that if "there is an interesting plot and a good author that is writing it doesn't matter" what the gender of the protagonist may be. However, Mason qualified his answer by saying that "Yeah if the central characters are male I like it a bit more." These comments support the research gathered by Johnson and Greenbaum (1982) which showed that content appeared to be of greater importance than the sex of the character in stories.

Question number three was of particular interest to me. I believed asking the students if their English course meets their reading preferences could give me some insight as to the level of interest that does exist in my classroom because of the literature I have selected. All but one of the girls answered this question and only three of the boys did, which is interesting in and of itself as the students were given a choice as to which questions they wished to address.

The three boys' responses were negative in some respects. Neil clearly stated that "The English course does not meet my reading preferences." He does not like the fact that all that is done "in English is read interpretive stuff." He goes on to say that he doesn't "really enjoy it" and "wouldn't read it outside of school." His greatest disappointment comes from the fact that in "English we pick apart stories. For me this takes the fun out of reading. A little analysis is okay but we kill the stories." Aaron talked of how in literature, he believes "there has to be a physical purpose" and as for the stories "Boys and Girls" and "Day of the Butterfly"—they are boring. The

advantage of being in English class is that it gives him "a chance to understand what I like in literature and what I don't like."

Mac takes a sympathetic stance, indicating that he has "never really thought about how the course meets my reading preferences because… the teacher [has] certain guidelines to follow" and considering those guidelines, he believes that "yes, my reading preferences are being met." Now that Mac has become a somewhat converted reader, he acknowledged that "reading in class isn't too bad. It's still pretty bad, but I still hate it because some of the stories really suck. I can't get into to them if they're boring."

Only one of the girls flat out indicated that her English course did not meet her reading preferences. Amy said that she was "not mad about that because I understand that the teacher has to pick literature for us to read and it can't meet all" of the needs of the students in the room. She goes on to reveal that in her opinion, the literature she studies "in school is sometimes boring, I like mystery and romance novels." She contrasts her interests with what is being studied in class, stating that the literature she usually studies is "about people who deal with their problems and end up fixing it somehow." Lisa, who indicated that she does "not like the idea of having someone tell me that I have to read a book", wrote the only other response that seemed to mirror Amy's.

The rest of the girls indicated that the English course met their reading preferences, but all of them qualified their responses with words such as 'somewhat' and 'most of the time.' Nan liked the fact that for the booktalk, or independent reading requirement, she "can choose the novels I want to read and I can enjoy reading them." However, when she turned her discussion to the literature studied in the classroom, she indicated that her reading preferences were not being met, especially with many of the short stories and the modern drama *Billy Bishop Goes to War*. She believed that in order for her "to do well [she] has to like what [she] is reading" stating that last year, when we studied Greek myths, she loved it and did well. Rachel seemed to agree with Nan, enjoying the fact that she "can choose [her] own books" to read, but for the formal study of literature in the classroom "would like to see…more mystery or fantasy…since I never pick up these books." She writes that she views "these areas as very boyish reading areas and I just can't find a good novel." Baym (1990) seems to support these girls' views as she believes that "no mere expansion of the canon, in and of itself, can guarantee any particular kind of reading…but the expanded canon is a

potential that can be implemented in a variety of ways" (p. 64).

Lauren shared in her journal that she felt that the short story unit was not full of "boring stories" and that I was "also keeping us interested" although she neglects to expand and share how that was being accomplished. Kate also seemed to share Lauren's views about the short story unit, indicating that "the short stories that are picked out for us are usually of interest for" her.

Alison seemed to intrinsically understand the dilemma that faces teachers in selecting literature, realizing that it is "essential to keep the whole class interested in what [is done] in class. When this happens though, everyone will like some of the literature [that is] read and not like some [that is] read." Johnson and Greenbaum (1982) do not believe that a teacher's classroom decisions regarding reading interests and learning should rely solely on the sex of the readers but on the individuals reading, which is where this dilemma lies. Baym (1990) notes "whether male or female, readers demand pleasure" (p. 63). However, in a structured literature classroom, as Alison has noted, this desire for pleasure can be a challenge to achieve when the one in control of the decisions is the teacher and not the readers.

All but two of the girls and two of the boys responded to question number four. Seven of the girls agreed that in some ways, males and females do communicate differently. Rachel was the only exception. She stated that "females and males speak alike. Both sexes know English and speak it just as well as the other." She wrote that the miscommunication occurs because "we are not interested in the same subjects." She also stated that "males do have the tendency to communicate less and when they do speak, use less words." When addressing the idea that male and female writers may write differently, she disagreed, noting that "Writers write in a formal and educated manner and it doesn't matte whether it is male or female."

Lauren and Lisa believe that there are some differences in the way males and females communicate, but it depends on the situation. Lauren stated that she does "not believe that women and men writers really communicate their ideas all that different in stories. Because most of the time authors are educated in what they do." However, she did "believe that women and men in general do…Females express themselves more freely and open where as men grunt, groan and point. Men talk in fragment sentences." Lisa said that "Sure men and women use different language to communicate to each other but I do not think that it is the same way when you get older." Looking at writers, Lisa noted that "if a male wrote a story based on a man

then he can write one about a female just as good as a female would and vice versa."

Kate thought that there was definitely a difference in the ways males and females communicate which translates into the ways in which writers write. She has "noticed that males usually write about things that are important to them and therefore other males and females write about what is important to them." Ellen, too, clearly stated that males and females and different ways to communicate and she does "think that authors make some choices regarding their gender. But they are very small."

Amy characterized male communication in her response. She saw that "Men are more abrupt and to the point. Women are talkative and explain more." She also believed that "its the same for writers." She noted in the closing of her response that "Women are more expressive and emotional, [that's] why I like reading their literature better."

Barbara believes that the difference in the ways men and women communicate "makes it sometimes harder for the opposite sex but I believe when they write they have to appeal to both boys and girls so they remember that and keep how they communicate very simple."

Nan supported her notion that males and females communicate differently by drawing attention to the poems the class had written earlier in the semester. "The females wrote about personal experience while the males wrote about sports and war."

All of the boys, who responded to question number four, felt that there were certainly differences in the way males and females communicate. Kurt stated that "men usually use a lot less words when talking to each other than females do, mainly because the males usually have the same thoughts or intentions." Mac noted that his area of expertise does not cover the world of writing, but in the area of verbal language, he certainly noticed a difference. "Males use more grunts and groans to express what they are trying to say. Where as females like to gipper about nothing…Men don't talk, they use body language instead."

Darren expressed how hard it was for him to answer questions in English class while the girls "certainly know how to explain things better." He was not sure if this was the case for an author but he does know that he tends "to understand a story much better if a male is writing it." Ethan also acknowledged that the differences lie in the degree to which females and males explain their ideas. "Females, I think, tend to be more [explanatory] in their ideas than males…in stories by female author's there is more descriptive and explanitory writing than a males."

Neil didn't necessarily believe that authors have a different language determined by their gender, "but their stories seemed centred more around 'guy' or 'girl' stuff." He did say that "With books that I have read I haven't been able to tell between a guy and girl author."

Question number five asked the students if they believed that any of their courses were 'male' or 'female' courses. All but one of the girls responded to this question. Four of the girls agreed that there were specific courses that are considered 'male' or 'female' while the other five disagreed.

Rachel was one of the four girls who felt that there were courses for specific genders. She thought that "math and Science are male courses and English and Social are female courses." She also noted that males are usually teaching the math and science courses, while females are teaching the English and social studies courses. Lauren agreed with Rachel, noting that in math and science you "can see, touch and do calculations" which is more for males. In social studies and English "You have to see beyond the obvious and expand on your ideas and answers" which she believes makes these courses designed more for females.

Kate stated that it was only logical that boys would excel in "math and science courses [which] are taught by males who speak 'male 'language" and girls would excel in English which "is usually taught by females speaking 'female' language." Nan focused her response on English as a female course stating that "Men aren't very good at expressing themselves or interpreting things. They are very black and white and totally miss the gray area." All of the girls' comments indicating English as a female oriented course supports Flynn's (1986) observations that women more often arrive at meaningful interpretations of text because of the way in which they evaluate characters and situations.

The rest of the girls did not believe that any of the courses are designed for a specific gender but for all students. Lisa feels that the courses are for everyone, "It is just that males like other subjects then maybe females do…the males like it if it is in their genes or something." Amy believed the perception of male and female courses has more to do with motivation. "Both males and females can analyze literature…I think its just that males are more lazy." She believes that a male teacher would influence her achievement. "I think that because males don't communicate as well, when they teach they just tell you the steps and give you the assignment. Well, I can't learn that way I need things explained in lots of detail." Ellen too believes that the

courses aren't necessarily for males or females but in a class like English, finding symbols is "something [males] don't enjoy doing."

Barbara noted that boys do tend to do better in math and science and girls do better in English and social, but she believes that the "teachers have a big role in that" not necessarily the gender of the teacher specifically.

Alison stated that "both males and females can excel in any of the courses." She believes that the reason that males don't do well in English is because it is not "socially acceptable for guys to like reading and write emotionally or express their feelings." She also noted that she does well in math because she likes finding the answer and knowing that it is right.

All five of the boys who, responded to question number five, agreed that there were high school courses designed specifically for males or females. What is interesting is many of the boys focused on courses that were not core requirements. Kurt acknowledged that boys tend to do better in math and science and girls tend to do better in English. However, he also noted that "Home Economics is mainly seen as a female course, but there are a lot of males in it." Ethan also talked about home economics, drama, industrial education and mechanics. He stated that "In shop most of the females do ceramics and photos, very few do woods or welding. If they do a wood's project they usually get a male to cut their wood for them and assemble the project."

Darren revealed that the courses he believes are for males, science, mechanics and outdoor education, "are taught by male teachers. Basically in these courses there is one [right] answer and you have formulas or ways to get to those answers." He wrote that social and English courses are considered to be female courses because "there is more than one right answer or you have to make up the answer." He clearly stated at the end of his response that he thinks "that the males don't do well [in English] because we are forced to read female literature most of the time and we can't relate to them as well."

Neil believes that "Males are more calculating and have more scientific minds compared to girls." He also stated that males are more fact oriented and that is why math, science and social "would seem to suit us better." Both Neil and Mason definitely saw English as a female course. Neil stated that "There is a lot of interpretive stuff and I'm not good at that stuff." Mason believes that "Women tend to get higher grades than guys in the course because they are able to argue why they are

right."

None of the boys responded to question number six, which asked the students to describe a teacher who they felt acted as a role model for them. However, all ten of the girls chose to respond to this question. The girls wrote about ten different female teachers and four different male teachers they felt acted as role models for them.

As a pleasant surprise, Lisa acknowledged how much of a positive role I have played for her. She stated that she came into the class from distance learning knowing nothing and I was "always congratulating me on my accomplishments…Never have you abandoned me and said learn for yourself."

Three girls acknowledged their senior high science teacher as a positive role model. Nan noted that this teacher "is very smart and has the respectable [nature] to him." Barbara liked that "he cares if I pass or fail." Anna stated that "he teaches both genders equally, also he was able to get my marks up much higher than I have ever expected in science."

Amy and Rachel recognized their grade 6 teacher as someone special. For Amy, this teacher taught her "how to work hard and get positive results…She treated everyone the same in her class. Whenever anyone needed help she was their." Rachel revealed that this teacher was not her role model at first, but once she passed grade six with honors, she recognized that "She pushed us so much it was all we could do but succeed. That year I actually liked math and did well. Every day was something new."

Ellen liked the fact that her grade four teacher "didn't disrespect me, she treated everyone fairly and had respect for every individual and had no favorites."

Lauren simply named her female grade 6 teacher as a role model, but went on to describe her high school drama teacher who "helped me express my ideas and do things I would have been scared of doing otherwise."

Rachel also mentioned her grade three teacher as a role model. She admired how organized she was and how "She never treated us like little children and hardly every got mad. In return we would all work as hard as we could."

Anna noted that while her male high school science teacher helped bring up her marks, so did her grade 5 teacher. She "was nice and loving and [was] always trying to help, she took extra time for me because the school I had attended before had no teaching skills."

Amy considered her junior high language arts teacher to be her role model for the same reason as she did her female grade 6 teacher. Amy stated that "She helped prepare me for high school. She taught me that what you put in is what you get out. She was fair and respectful. She's someone who I will always look up to."

Kate too acknowledged her middle school language arts teacher as someone who has had a positive impact on her life. "She showed the [up most] respect for her students while being one of the most disciplined and educated…person I know. She taught me a lot, not only about [English] but about life." She also described her grade 8 and 9 language arts teacher who "was not one of the teachers that taught [her] the most but [she] could trust her and talk to her about anything. She is a role model to [her] because she is caring and understanding and [she] believes that those characteristics are important."

As with question number six, no boys chose to respond to question number seven which asked the students if they felt they had missed out on any opportunities in the past because of their gender. Four of the girls stated that they do not feel that they have missed out on anything and two of the girls explain what they believe they have missed out on because they are female.

Lisa did not feel she has missed out on anything because she is a girl. She has "done everything that [she] has wanted to." She did not believe that gender should "matter if you want to accomplish something. You can do anything you put your mind to." Amy agreed with Lisa, noting that she felt "that I have had the choices I deserve and I will do what I want."

Barbara loves who she is and her gender and she "wouldn't change anything", although she does joke about how nice it would be not to have to wear a bra or have a menstrual cycle.

Rachel did not believe she has missed on out anything because she has "always been around [her] brothers…[she has] had lots of 'guy' opportunities."

Kate and Nan felt they have missed out on something important to them because of their gender. Kate looked to her parents and felt that because they saw her as a girl they encouraged her to "dance rather than play sports." She loves to watch sports and expressed some regret that she is not good at any of them. Nan's personal experience is an emotional one. She felt that "If I was a boy I probably would have been able to be more attached to my father before he got sick. My brother got to work with him in the garage. Shoot guns with him. Use bow and arrows but I never got to

do any of that stuff cause I'm I girl. The things that prove this is now my brother is the only one my dad can recognize."

For the last question, five girls and one boy responded. The students were asked, in extension of the previous question, if they had any concerns about missing out on any future opportunities because of their gender. Two of the girls had some concerns about their future opportunities while the other three girls and one boy did not feel that they would miss out on anything because of their gender.

Kate and Rachel were concerned that they may face some obstacles in the workforce. Kate simply stated that she hoped "that [she] will be treated fairly in the workplace." Rachel thinks "there still are workforces that only hire males or maybe only promote males." She concluded her response by confidently stating "If they won't hire me than it is their loss."

Lisa, Barbara and Amy felt confident that they would not miss out on any opportunities in the future because of their gender. Lisa did not think "gender should be an issue in what [she] decides to do" with her future. She believes that "If someone really wants to do something, they will let nothing come in their way." Barbara believes that today the opportunities for males and females are equal. Amy wrote a lengthy response, expressing her confident knowledge of where she wanted to go and what she wanted to do with her future. She believes there is "a place for females and a place for males" noting that certain jobs are geared towards males and certain jobs are geared toward females and we all know that to be true. She emphatically stated that "There isn't anything holding me back."

Kurt, the only boy to respond to this question, expressed no concern about missing out on some opportunity in the future because he is male. He stated that "jobs are now pretty much equal for both genders. Men and women can basically do any job they choose now."

Chapter 4
The Use of Reader's Response and Metacognitive Journals

Now for the time that remained to me, the most perfectly private and perhaps the best time of the whole day, I arranged myself tightly under the covers and went on with one of the stories I was telling myself from night to night.

Alice Munro

My first personal encounter with journals occurred during my undergraduate work at the university. I was required to jot down my reflections during my first observation practicum, which had me visiting two schools, a high school and an elementary school. It was through this exploratory writing that I knew the high school environment was certainly the one I wanted to be a part of. Next, I was required to keep a journal within my French minor course, which I took before I headed out for my first student teaching round. The journal continued into my teaching round and gave me an opportunity to reflect on my growth as a beginning professional. Again, a journal was required in my final student teaching round, in both the course work and during the student teaching experience. I know I still have that journal somewhere as it represents many of the idealistic thoughts and enthusiastic joys I experienced as I finished my degree.

During my quest for my master's degree, I have also had a chance to use the journal as a course requirement for both theory-related courses as well as English language arts based courses. My reflections have been far more rooted in experience and the questioning of theory, but the importance of the journal has not changed for me. I love to write and always saw this particular type of reflective assignment as a valuable one, a chance to "get off your chest" the feelings, issues, opinions and ideas that touch you to the core. Yes, they sometimes end up being full of rantings, but also end up being the beginnings of great teaching ideas and true evaluations of what I believe are important in my classroom and for myself as a teacher.

Robert Probst – My First Introduction

The first opportunity I had to read any literature written by Robert Probst was in the second year of my graduate program. I had just come off a leave of absence and was enrolled in a course called *Issues in the Teaching of English.* At this time, I was very interested in the reading habits of adolescents. I had noticed disturbing reading patterns in my classroom, especially where males were concerned. Why were boys so turned off of reading?

Required to read in an area of interest, I found an article in the *English Journal* by Probst called "Reader's Response Theory and the English Curriculum" (March 1994). I read the article and was intrigued by how many of Probst's ideas matched some of the practices I had been using in my classroom. I was especially impressed to see some of the reasons why this strategy, although sometimes time consuming and a frustrating thing to mark and motivate students with, was an effective tool for engaging students with literature. Probst's ideas validated all the reasons why I had continued to use the response type method, sometimes even with limited success. As well, this article opened up my eyes to the idea that response to literature did not always have to be a written response – which was a gateway of possibility for me. I could add a whole new dimension to the aspect of reader's response – group work, improvisation and classroom discussion – and not limit student response to writing in journals alone.

The article, which was just a taste of Probst's theories about reader's response, led me to get his book, *Response and Analysis: Teaching Literature in Junior and Senior High School* (1988). I think I am responsible for the somewhat worn spine, cover and bent pages as I have read and re-read this book many times, gaining both insight into the theory behind this valuable teaching tool, and some strategies for using it successfully in my classroom.

In the preface, Probst (1988) says that his book "argues that literature is experience, not information, and that the student must be invited to participate in it, not simply to observe it from the outside. Thus the student is very important – not simply a recipient of information, but rather a maker of knowledge out of meetings with literary texts" (p. 1). He goes on to indicate that this approach has been highly advocated by Louise Rosenblatt in her book, *Literature as Exploration* (1938) and that many of his ideas draw heavily on her work. I remember seeing the date of this

particular book and giggling to myself, wondering why it had taken modern critics of literary analysis and reading theory to catch up and take notice of such an important and often quoted work.

Most importantly, Probst states in the preface "that knowledge is made, not found; that making knowledge is a verbal operation; and that the business of making knowledge is not for professionals and scholars alone, but is everyone's task" (p. 2). I remember being profoundly affected by this notion, which I believed in so much at the time, which more or less says that students need to be readers and enjoy literature for its own sake before they are made to be critics and deep analyzers. Life long readers, not life long analyzers and critics – that is what I wanted for my students, and had never really thought that discussing the symbolic significance of the title ever did that completely for all of them.

The Reader, the Text and Other Readers

When I first began preparing for my classroom project related to my thesis study, I went back to revisit Probst again, not having read his text in two years. Essentially, I was looking for some background about engagement with literature and factors that may influence that engagement. The first two chapters of his book *Response and Analysis: Teaching Literature in Junior and Senior High School* (1988) gave me a great deal of background information relating to reading, the doors into the texts students read and the influence of other readers and other responses.

If only a few students come to the English classroom with a scholarly passion for information about literary texts, then why do they come to English class? Ask any of them and for the most part, they will say as my students do, "I have to have this course to graduate." As a teacher, this attitude presents a huge obstacle that may or not be ever overcome. Probst (1988) states that most secondary students will enter the workforce and will never again be asked to do to literature what we as English teachers ask them to do. Therefore, if all teachers do is teach literary analysis and focus on literary scholarship, are we not doing them a disservice? Students bring with them "experiences, interests, and a lengthy agenda of problems, worries, and attitudes, all of which concern or preoccupy them" (p. 3). Therefore, if literature can be found which touches on some of these preoccupations, students will have a reason to read – one that is not just because they have to or are told to.

Probst (1988) argues that the adolescent who is "characteristically preoccupied with self, should be an ideal reader" (p. 4). Adolescents have many questions about the world around them and do not understand all that they wish to. Literature should strike a chord in adolescents as, being concerned mostly with self, literature invites their participation and their judgement. As Probst (1988) believes, students read literature to know themselves. They are not going to all become literary professors, but people who can enjoy literature for its entertainment value and merit as an art form would be more a desirable goal. Stover (1992) agrees with Probst, advocating that one of the goals of any literature program is the exploration of the gendered self. She believes that both "male and female students need books to read which validate their own experience as young men or women, but also challenge that experience, perhaps showing them options of which they have been unaware" (p. 94).

Probst argues against teaching literature according to genre or literary history. He notes that lists of texts, names, concepts, terms and dates could more easily be divided into units and lessons, which provide a reassuring structure to the teaching of English Language Arts. However, he comes back to ask the question, "What do we want the literature student to experience and learn in our classes?" (p. 6). Essentially, he argues that it is not in the students' benefit to believe that the goals of the professional literature student are the same as the secondary English Language Arts student. "The literary experience is fundamentally an unmediated, private exchange between a text and a reader and literary history and scholarship are supplemental" and should never replace the immediacy of the experience (p. 7).

Now, as Probst believes that adolescents should be open to reading because of their interest in self, he goes on to indicate that this type of self-preoccupation leads to reflection and introspection. Through the experience of reading, students can be given the opportunity to reflect upon their own values, beliefs and ideas.

Probst argues that five conditions must be met in order to obtain strong, informed readings of a literary text. First, the responses and perceptions of the students must be readily welcomed. This creates an environment of receptivity, which allows responses to build openly on each other rather than has students led to a predetermined conclusion about the work being studied. Students need to feel free to respond openly to the literature, but also realize that a first response to a selection is only the beginning and may need to be revised or clarified in order for meaning to occur. All students in the classroom must also feel free from mockery and should not

be made to submit to the authority of the teacher or the author.

The second condition is the ability for students to be willing to take risks and express tentative thoughts and feelings or even to change their minds. This condition of tentativeness builds on the idea that initial responses are not complete and should be treated like a draft of writing that needs to be revisited and re-examined. Students should not be in pursuit of the "right" answer and teachers should not try to illicit one from their students.

The third condition follows directly from the second. Students must be willing to think beyond their initial response. They must be willing to look rigorously throughout a text to search for assumptions, draw out inferences and attitudes and consider other points of view offered by the teacher, the students or other critics. Students need to be freed from the notion that there is one right answer they are searching for and shown that there is a realm of possibility within a text that needs to be explored. Gabriel (1992) agrees that "the 'ideal answer' will have to be reevaluated and more room will have to be allowed for divergent reading and responses" (p. 138).

The fourth condition can only truly occur if and when the other three are in place. The group of students in the classroom must work well together. A degree of trust and respect for individuality must be achieved as well as an understanding that not all responses will match a particular student's response or be interesting or relevant. Gabriel (1992) also strongly recommends that students be given class time to discuss and analyze their gendered readings of literature.

The last condition, which informs my thesis most directly, is the idea that suitable literature must be selected for use in the classroom. Probst says that this type of literature provides "some substance – ideas, style, language, attitude, whatever – worthy of reflection" (p. 27). He acknowledges how difficult a task this can be as the ability to match each text to each individual student is a near to impossible task and sometimes limited resources can influence the ability to match student interest and literature. However, Probst believes that his response pattern of instruction will invite students to first talk about themselves, which they are most interested in, which should then provoke sufficient reaction to begin a discussion of the literature to be studied.

Probst outlines five principles of response-based teaching in his text, which certainly build on the five conditions that must be met for students to have an informed literary reading of a text. The first is the principle of selection. Literature should be selected for its potential interest and connection to students. Probst argues

that "selecting literature simply because it illustrates a genre, or exemplifies a period of history or demonstrates certain literary techniques, is less likely to be successful than selecting it because it is appropriate to the students who will read it" (pp. 33-34).

The second principle is centred on the concepts of responses and questions. The "discussion should concentrate, at least at first, on the students' responses. They should be encouraged to accept those responses, whatever form they take, and move from there to a closer analysis" (p. 34). Probst warns the teacher that his job is "not to shape responses with his questions," because the last thing a teacher will want is for the students to only follow his lines of predisposed thought and not explore ideas of their own. (p. 34).

The third principle is what Probst refers to as atmosphere. In the classroom, "the teacher must try to cultivate an atmosphere that is cooperative rather than competitive. The discussions should build, one idea feeding the next, with participants gradually acquiring sharper insights, changing their minds, and adding the observations of others to their own, broadening their perspectives on the work" (p. 34). As well, in this cooperative environment, students must be encouraged to make tentative statements, which can later be withdrawn or revised as the discussion continues.

Probst describes the fourth principle as one of relativity. He believes that there can be no absolutes as each piece of literature is created by each individual reader. He does realize that some students will share foolish or incorrect readings. Therefore:

> the rejection of absolutes does not mean that everything is a matter of opinion. The teacher, while respecting the individuality of his students and the difficulties of seeing clearly into their minds, and deprived of the clear and absolute standards that the New Criticism attempts to offer, must gently pull the students towards intelligent examination of their responses to literature (p. 35).

The last principle recognizes that response can come in a variety of forms, with interpretation will not be the only or the best culminating activity in a discussion. The example that Probst shares to illustrate this point is where he describes the value of a song. "Just as we may value a song because it reminds of us a distant friend, so a literary work may serve us by bringing some non-literary experience to mind" (p. 35).

In other words, students are going to have valuable experiences which may not be tied directly to the text, but certainly help inform them about the text they are studying.

Probst's Forms of Reader's Response

Probst recognizes that the teacher has a difficult task ahead of her as she prepares students to respond to text and share their responses. "Overcoming the inertia of the group and breaking down the resistance to the work of thinking requires some ingenuity on the part of the teacher" (p. 40). Of course, if the work touches upon matters which directly relate to the students and it is read with some ease, a strong response as well as a strong discussion should naturally follow. However, Probst reminds teachers that it is "surprising how often works that seem to have little relevance to the students will nonetheless sustain a long and energetic discussion....as though the literary work has served as the catalyst to an examination of oneself and one's friends in the classroom" (p. 40).

Probst believes that the frequency of the successful response and energetic discussion can be increased if teachers are willing to do a few specific things. One, teachers must let students know that their individual responses, no matter what form they may take, are welcome at any time. By taking individual student responses and addressing them as valuable in the classroom, the teacher will open up the classroom as the atmosphere has become cooperative and sharing, which will stimulate lots of talk and lots of thought.

As well, teachers can put mild pressure on students to think and create their responses to a given piece of literature by asking them to respond, spontaneously, to a text immediately after having read it. "Without dictating a form for the notes, she may suggest that they could be questions, observations about the worth of the piece, memories it called to mind, speculations about the writer, or confirmation or rejection of the ideas presented" (p. 41). This type of spontaneous response allows students for an immediate reaction to the text that is both critical and personal. Their response will be formulated from their individual encounter with the text and will not be influenced in any way by the group reading. There will be no ideas to agree with or disagree with. Probst believes that once these spontaneous responses are completed, students "may feel some commitment to develop or explore it, since it is their own" (p. 41).

Options present to the teacher at this point are numerous. A teacher could ask

students to share their ideas by paraphrasing elements of their notes they wish to share. She could collect the papers and read out some of the ideas that may be provocative or may create strong reactions from the group, keeping the identity of the writer anonymous. An informal discussion could emerge from the initial spontaneous response, where a student shares a specific comment and the group shares their responses to it. A list of specific ideas could be placed on the blackboard and addressed one by one to help the active, over-energetic groups focus on all of the important ideas and responses rather than a few that illicit their initial interests and reactions. No matter what method is chosen, Probst reminds teachers that they "should keep in mind that the brief writing period is intended to force the students into solitary, unassisted thought about the work read, and to obtain that thought from them so that it can be discussed by the group" (p. 42).

He continues to provide suggestions to teachers about their roles in the discussions that emerge from the spontaneous response. The teacher needs to demonstrate her respect for the variety of responses she will get in the classroom "by refraining from criticism of the statements and by managing the discussion with some discretion" (p. 42). This does not mean the teacher should just allow the students to discuss ideas at random and should avoid any guidance in the discussion, but could suggest students move on after a lengthy discussion of an idea, and could suggest the next point for them to address.

This first response, no matter what form it is in, is a very important first step for students. Probst believes that it "will draw more students into the conversation" as it "does not pretend to great scholarship, breadth of reading or depth of insight; it simply comments on the person created" by the work (p. 43). As well, the first response may allow students a chance to reflect on their own perceptions or values. This type of discussion is very concrete, and "demands actual thought, not simply the facile manipulation of phrases which is likely to be encouraged by too hasty an effort to discuss 'twentieth-century poetry'" (p. 43). It is only after this sort of concrete, first response discussion will students be ready to deal with a more abstract second response.

The second response, according to Probst, "tends toward the abstract, the formal, and the scholarly, and it makes broad statements" about the literature being studied. (p. 42). This type of response, if required early on, would place very intimidating or annoying demands on students who would very likely inhibit their

ability and desire to share their tentative ideas. Probst believes that this type of response, elicited early, "is likely to lead to vague talk that, by avoiding specifics, manages to sound impressive without saying anything at all" (p. 43). The questions or concepts raised during the second response are abstract in the sense that they ask students to consider the characteristics of twentieth-century poetry, or the characteristics of Dylan or Thomas' style. These questions are often more difficult to deal with on a first read and Probst does not recommend beginning with them, although he does recognize that these issues have their place in a classroom discussion.

Instead of leaving the responses open, and somewhat spontaneous, a teacher can also vary the pattern of response by offering a specific constraint to the responses students create. The teacher could ask the students to focus their responses on a specific aspect of the work such as setting, character motivation, conflict or the values/beliefs present in the work. Or, the teacher could suggest that students respond from a particular perspective, which asks them to create or recreate a persona. However, Probst warns, "any restriction on student response sacrifices something" (p. 46). He believes that "constraints on the response diminish the chances that it will be so intimate a part of the reader. The constrained response is the result of the encounter of three forces – the reader, the text, and the assignment; that third variable might interfere with the interaction of the first two" (p. 46). The assignment, under no circumstances should be allowed to dominate the literature itself. Probst advocates that "the essential feature of response-based literature teaching is that it makes every effort to ensure that students discover their own route into the literature" (p. 46).

The last form of response that Probst formally discusses is the longer response paper. This type of response demands that students write a response, perhaps several pages in length that deeply explores their reactions to a work, tracing them as far back into their own personal history and as deeply into the text as they can. This response demands that students do more than generate topics for discussion, but sustain their thinking without receiving any support from the teacher or their fellow students. Just as the shorter response assignments, teachers can place constraints on the response, which Probst sees as beneficial. He believes the constraints help to sustain and focus the students' responses. He also suggests that because the demands of a longer paper are high that teachers should "begin with very brief writing assignments and then gradually ask for more extensive statements" (p. 47).

He specifically notes a technique used by Adler which this researcher calls "answering the unanswered question." Adler suggests "inviting students to identify the unanswered questions in a work of literature and propose answers to them" (p. 47). This technique allows a student to take a very close look at both her and the text in order to answer the unanswered. Another technique Probst mentions is one designed by Bleich, which asks for students to respond to what they believe to be the most important word, the most important passage and then the most important feature of the work being studied. Probst seems to appreciate this technique as it is clear that each person will interpret the word "important" very differently, allowing for a wide range of possible responses.

Dealing with these longer response papers is not an easy task and Probst recognizes this difficulty. He proposes that the longer responses papers more closely resemble the literary papers, which creates some pitfalls for students. Many students view literary papers "as exercises in avoiding errors or predicting the teacher's views" which is certainly a perception harmful to a response based approach. Probst believes that teachers must read through and respond to the longer papers, just as the shorter, spontaneous responses are dealt with in class. However, there are a variety of ways teachers can allow for responses to be generated to these lengthier papers.

Teachers can hold conferences with individual students, which would allow teachers to meet many specific goals. One, conferences can help students see the shared purpose of reading, with two individuals sitting down and attempting to work towards a better understanding of the work in front of them. The conference can be seen as a cooperative effort, full of negotiation and exploration. A second goal is to allow the teacher the opportunity to model the type of response expected in the full class. Elements of respect, logic, reason and evidence can be modeled through the discussion with the student. Last, a conference could be an opportunity to assess student work. "The seriousness of her efforts to understand the literature and deal rationally with her responses to it may be more readily judged in a private conference than in the aftermath of full-class sessions" (p. 51). However, Probst puts forth the idea that the final judgements placed upon the responses must be the student's judgements. "In private conferences the teacher may be frank, asking more penetrating questions, encouraging the student to take responsibility for self-examination" (p. 51).

Group discussions can also be initiated to allow students to share their longer

responses. Smaller groups can be formed and given specific sharing guidelines to follow. Eventually, students will become comfortable with this sharing notion in groups, and the somewhat rigid sharing expectations can be omitted, allowing students more openness in their groups to explore the ideas in ways they wish to.

Probst even advocates the use of drama processes as a method of reader response. It may take time for students to gain some comfortability with mime or improvisation or monologue, but once used to the techniques, drama could allow students a gateway into the literature they never would have had through either an open, initial written response, or a formulated longer written response. Even after their engagement with the drama process, students could be asked how they felt and thought. Probst has found that by asking these questions once the drama activity is over, "students report feeling emotions they had not anticipated, or feeling expected emotions more strongly than they had anticipated" (p. 62). Probst believes that "just as varying response statements yield discussion by showing alternative readings of a poem, so might varying improvisations reveal the alternatives from which the writer has selected" (p. 63).

Essentially, Probst believes that no matter what form the responses take, and how they are shared, the "response papers will serve as a source of some insight into the students themselves" (p. 53). No matter what the content of the response, the papers should show the students that their thoughts, feelings and reactions to literature are valued and worth sharing with others. As well, these initial responses, lengthy or short, can act as springboards into a variety of other writing assignments such as creating original fiction or a critical essay.

As well as outlining the specific forms of response, Probst also shares the range of responses found in a response-based program. Probst recognizes that "the range of response is, of course, infinite; each reader is unique and will react differently from day to day depending on the circumstances" (p. 58). However, in his mind, the majority of the responses fall into five rough categories.

Probst labels the first category of response as personal. Essentially, he sees this type of response as comments about oneself. The response often contains many references to feelings or emotions elicited from the text. Interestingly, these types of responses "may draw heavily upon the text, but they are more likely to depart from it or abandon it completely, as the reader explores memories awakened by the work" (p. 56). This type of response, not usually the one valued in literature instruction, is one

that is still an important springboard and teachers must encourage students who begin here to explore their own thoughts and see where they take them. Teachers can also guide students along the path of response, by asking them specific questions that will give them a chance to explore the connection between themselves and the work. Probst does warn teachers about three pitfalls to personal response entries. One, these types of entries may dominate a student's work and will therefore stop them from avoiding any serious contemplation of the literature in front of them. As well, a classroom could end up becoming a place for excessive self-sharing and voyeurism as there will be students who will not be able to avoid the desire to bare their souls to eager listeners. Essentially, it is the teacher's job again, as a guide, to move the students away from this type of response by steering the discussion onto a different path or perhaps engaging the contributions of another student. Last, personal comments could lead to amateur psychoanalysis. Probst states that the "student's response may be examined and analyzed, but the student should not be, except insofar as she wishes to do herself" (p. 58).

The second type of response is a topical one that focuses on an issue raised in the literature studied. These responses can also stray widely from the text as students may have a real backlog of concerns or ideas surrounding the issue. These students will use the opportunity created in the response classroom to share all their ideas, not considering very closely the actual text that elicited the response in the first place. The test of the teacher is to help the student gear their enthusiastic energy back into the text. A teacher can ask the student to explore that issue in relation to how the characters may feel about it or perhaps how the author feels about it. Probst believes the difficulty will not be in getting the students to share their opinions about the issues in the text, but to persuade "them to pause long enough to hear what the writer has to say" (p. 58).

The third type of response that is found in the reader's response classroom is the interpretive response, which is the student's efforts to judge the significance of the piece of literature studied. In this type of response, the reader focuses specifically on the text. This type of response generally does not consider anything outside of the text such as a personal story or a personal opinion on an issue and how that issues lives outside of the text. The only concern that Probst shares with this type of response is that students must be aware of the importance of supporting their inferences. Students must learn the difference between stating an opinion and an inference. Inferences

demand some type of support from the text as the student is analyzing and attempting to interpret the words of someone else. Probst believes that "marshalling such evidence is an extremely important skill that deserves a significant place in the literature classroom" (p. 59).

Probst calls the next possible topic for response *form*. Essentially, the student who responds in this fashion is responding to the specific form elements of the literature such as suspense, repetition and imagery. Probst believes that "interested students should be encouraged to discuss those elements and even analyze them" but such analysis should not be overemphasized (p. 59). Students must continue to see the literature as an experience to have not a painful task to work through.

The last type of response found in students' work is one which addresses the "broader literary concerns" which include elements such as an interest in biography, literary periods, the working habits of the writer, and the history of the times portrayed (p. 60). Probst sees these interests as "the lucky events of teaching" (p. 60). Again, he advocates that students should be encouraged to explore interests in these areas, but that the focus should not be on these concerns.

All of these key points influenced my use of journals and response based methodology in my classroom. Therefore, I knew that I would have to take these ideas into consideration as I planned for the thesis project in my classroom.

Jerry Wowk's Reader's Response Format – A Variation

I have heard Jerry Wowk speak to groups of teachers four different times over my teaching career. The first time I had an opportunity to hear him discuss reading and the junior high classroom I was moved by his enthusiasm and desire to motivate students to read and respond honestly to their choices. However, it was the presentations he made in the fall of 1999 to the Pre-Pilot teachers for the new Senior High English Language Arts Program of Studies that definitely impacted my use of response in the classroom.

His presentation made at ELAC in May 2000, entitled "Making Meaning: Student Self-Directed Response" was made as my thesis classroom project was half finished and was the workshop version of the mini presentation I had seen months before. The first part of his presentation was theoretical, which had him quoting passages from Louise M. Rosenblatt's book *Literature as Exploration* (1938) which

Jerry later told me was one of the writers who most influenced his approach.

In trying to find a way to provide a sense of structure to his students' responses, Wowk quotes Rosenblatt, stating that "the necessity [is] not to impose a set of preconceived notions about the proper way to react to any work. The student must be free to grapple with his own reaction…instead of trying to superimpose routine patterns, the teacher will help the student develop these understandings in the context of his own emotions and his own curiosity about life and literature" (p. 66). Now, Wowk admits that this can be a messy situation as students try to find a comfortable place to begin and end their responses, but it is necessary that they find their route and we provide just a few simple road signs along the way.

Wowk believes that students will bring to any given text what they are able to and that is their starting point. What the student receives from the literature, personally or critically, can help him understand the world around him. As important is the ability to "listen with understanding to what others have to say and to respond in relevant terms" (p. 71). Wowk shares his own responses, other student responses and provides a great deal of modeling of his method of response for the students, seeing the sharing and modeling as learning opportunities. Their journals are their 'writing to learn' quest, making them, in his eyes, a reading assignment moreso than a writing assignment.

Rosenblatt indicates that "The youth needs to be given the opportunity and the courage to approach literature personally, to let it mean something to him directly. The classroom situation with the teacher should create a feeling of security. He should be made to feel that his own response to books, even though it may not resemble the standard critical comments, is worth expressing" (p. 67).

Critically, Rosenblatt states that a work of literature "must carry its own message to each of us. Nevertheless, the student should be led to discover that some interpretations are more defensible than others" (p. 124). As well, if a student is challenged to defend his interpretations, he will dig further into the text and into the literary techniques, providing him the opportunity to acquire different literary and social history bits of knowledge, which will surely lead to a deepened understanding of the work.

Knowing that students bring what they can to a text and respond to that, as well as connect personally and critically to a given text, Wowk created a response structure which guides students through a three step method of response.

Wowk outlines to his students on his response journal handout at the beginning of the term that a response journal:

> is a record of your reactions to what you have read (or hear or view). As you read, note your own reactions to the literature: explore your thoughts--observations, questions, feelings--about characters, events in the story, or significant ideas the writer is working with. Do not retell what happened in the story. Instead, ask yourself questions about why things happened as they did. But don't stop there. Work to answer your own questions.

His response format contains three parts. In part one, Wowk prompts the students by asking:

> What 'strikes' you in the story? What catches your attention? Focus on the one or two specific incidents or ideas you believe are most important in the story. Explore the reasons behind the story events. Explore the characters, and their motivations. What was the writer's purpose in writing the story? You may refer to lines, phrases or even individual words that caught your attention. How do they direct your understanding of the story?

For part two, Wowk asks the students to:

> Connect the important idea(s) identified above to an incident from your own life experience: it can be something that happened directly to you, or to someone you know, or to someone you've heard about or read about, or even to another story or movie you've read or seen. How does that particular incident from your own life experience help you to interpret and to better understand the important idea(s) in the story? Or vise-versa: does the story help you understand things happening in your own life?

In part three, the students are asked to:

> Apply the important ideas which the author has written about and you discussed in Part 1, and which you connected to your own life, to <u>the world</u>

> today. What makes the writer's ideas *universal*: important not only to you but to all people? Provide a generalized insight about life. This does not mean that you must necessarily agree with the writer's point of view. If you disagree, feel free to challenge what s/he has to say.

After outlining the three required sections of the response, Wowk encourages his students to "Think your way through what you have read. Each person responds to text in different ways. Your reaction to the text is unique to you – no one can create your meaning for you. The purpose of the *Journal* is not to test your knowledge, but to help you reach and under-standing of the literature, and to understand the impact literature is having on your life."

On occasion, and reflecting my previous notions of revisiting a text once it has been discussed and activities have been completed, Wowk will ask the students to complete a second look response. He describes these responses to the students as necessary because:

> You may feel, following further thinking about the story or even following small group or class discussion, that what you wrote in your original response requires more: perhaps more detailed explanations, or perhaps additional ideas which make your response more complete. The purpose of a second look is to go *deeper* into the text than you managed in the first response. Do not repeat what is said in the original response.

Students are encouraged to add their new thoughts, ideas or details to part one and part three, leaving the personal connection in its original response form. Having the students focus on these two particular parts of the response allows them to fall back on the structure and graphic Wowk provides, giving them a starting and finishing point, especially as the journals are encountered for the first time.

Wowk marks the journals using a rubric with three assessment criteria and this assignment is one that is ongoing for the entire course. As well as having the rubrics as the journals begin, the students are given a list of four statements that describe a strong response. Wowk takes the journals in to read and evaluate. On other occasions he will ask students to read their entries aloud in small groups or to the entire class. He tells the students that "The obvious purpose of the sharing will be to glean ideas

from one another, ideas which we might not have considered ourselves."

In email correspondence, I had a chance to ask Jerry Wowk a variety of questions about his response format. I asked him how long he has been using his format, the changes it has undergone, and which researchers, besides Louise Rosenblatt, influenced the creation and evolution of his approach. He told me that he:

> started in the early 1980's with my junior highs. Initially, I would focus their responses – and I got whatever I had focused them on. They were afraid to step out on their own. The evolution was in eventually finding a format that would provide a structure for response, without suggesting the content. What has basically influenced the evolution of the approach I use is/are the problems I encounter the previous year. I've never had a year yet where things have gone swimmingly. So I adjust constantly: my directions change, my rubrics change. What has evolved most visibly is the response 'situation' in that, while I begin every year the same way, insisting that every piece of text be responded to in essentially the same format, as the year goes along – once I see that the base has been established, internalized, that the kids are really 'reading' – then I alter the actual activities. I speak to the kids about reflecting on what they 'would' write, and then to present orally. Or I have them respond visually more, or kinetically. I put a greater onus on their having responded as they were reading, rather than stopping to write.

As for influences, Wowk notes Lev Vygotsky, in *Thought and Language*. He believes that his "concept of the zone of proximal development asks that we put kids into a level of thinking which forces them to stretch cognitively. It's a chaotic situation for them, but that's what is needed. It's like getting them off the bunny hill, where, if left, they would become experts – at bunny runs." Jerry also notes that the work of Arthur Applebee and Margaret Donaldson were also influences, although "There isn't any one thing that each of them brings – it all blends."

I asked Wowk what he perceives are the advantages of his reader's response approach. He sees reader's response as something that stretches "kids to think for themselves, to develop the confidence that they can reach understanding of complex text without needing to have their hands held." In his email, he shares that he:

> cannot ever see myself going back to what I used to do in the past…kids need to be able to feel confident that they themselves can come to see not only the ideas the writer was trying to convey, but the techniques the writer used to best convey them. I get kids coming back from first or second year at the U of A and even those who were not particularily strong feel good about their abilities relative to others in their courses. They aren't afraid to deal with text. And they aren't afraid to have been 'wrong' in their interpretations.

The only disadvantages that Wowk commented on were the "lack of time to read and fully respond to the kids' responses. Also the disillusionment in some kids when the teacher hasn't done it right."

I asked Wowk how much growth he sees in his students who are engaged in this approach. He notes that:

> The most visible growth we see at the school occurs in kids involved for three years in the Humanities program…That's not to say that kids with only one year don't show growth. They do. And they all – to greater or lesser degrees – find their own way to create meaning, even if it's only within their own framework of understanding. Isn't that where we all begin from? And with repeated practice and feedback, they learn to eliminate strategies which are less productive, and to tune into those that work. They approach text differently – actively, rather than passively. They become questioning of the text. They do this because they know that they will be required to respond, to share their response, and to do this without any assistance from the teacher…it is just them, alone with their own cognitive resources.

The last question I asked Wowk was if he noticed any similarities or differences between responses completed by the girls and the boys. Initially, Wowk indicated that there were:

> none that I cared to notice. But I haven't been looking. Perhaps, and this isn't 100%, girls tend to be more committed as a whole, and therefore more complete." In a later email, he clarified his ideas, stating that "About the only place where I can recall noticing differences between male and female

> responses is with gender-sensitive text. Not gender in the sense of protagonist/antagonist/narrative stance and so forth, but in terms of the issues at the heart of the text – those issues the responders identify as being at the core. If the issues happen to be such that females as a whole are more receptive to them, then perhaps there may be a difference. But I've had boys who have broken down the 'constraints' of gendered issues. I can remember a class of 33's, primarily boys, dealing with a personal narrative that revolved around the loss of some childhood artifact that provided a child a sense of stability throughout her youth. In the section of their responses they devote to making personal connections as a way of exploring the ideas, I must had had at least a half a dozen boys talking about either their teddy bears or their blankies. One, in fact, very cautiously, spoke of his doll. So again, unless the text solicits something, no, I don't really notice a gender difference in the response.

Impressed with Wowk's background and ever evolving reader's response format, I decided to incorporate his three part reader's response into my project. I wanted a way to look at the students understanding and appreciation of the literature selected for the study. I also wanted to look at the effectiveness of a reader's response journal as a learning tool in my classroom for both the boys and the girls.

Manifestation of Reader's Response in My Classroom

I know that the first real look I had at the use of the journal in the classroom came in my EDSEC 430 course, which was a course designed to provide ideas on how to teach writing to adolescents. The text for the course was *Inside Out: Developmental Strategies for Teaching Writing* by Dan Kirby and Tom Liner. The focus of the course was certainly on writing instruction, but did provide some strong background in the strength and purpose of the journal, which I know I took into my first year of teaching and into all of the courses I taught that year.

The authors believe that the journal is probably the most effective tool for establishing fluency in writers. They feel that the reasons students become more engaged in journaling is because they get chances to write about subjects that are important to them. As well, a de-emphasizing of spelling, punctuation and grammar also creates a freer environment for students to explore those ideas.

The reason the journal works, according to Kirby and Liner (1988) is that it is a safe and protected first place for students to open up, explore and dip into "the stream of language. Good journal writing is in the river of your mind" (p. 58). As well, students have a chance to write about what interests them, which allows for a clearer more powerful use of language. The authors also advocate that the journal is truly intended for an audience of one – the writer. Basically, this means that the students are talking to themselves, which is an important shift from teacher as audience to student as audience, allowing the emergence of a true and clear voice.

The authors describe four different journals that can be used in the classroom. One that I used most often in my own classroom at the beginning of my teaching career is a variation of the Classroom Journal or CJ. Essentially, this journal is kept in the classroom and students complete most of the writing during class time allotted. Kirby and Liner (1988) suggest that this journal works particular well for responding to literature. "Class discussions are far more enlightening if students have first logged a response to the selection in the CJs" (p. 62). It is their belief that this type of writing in response to literature creates a habit of discussing reading, writing about reading and classroom discussion. I know that as I adapted their ideas into my own approach to journalling, the most important aspect I took away was the idea that students need to write during class time. I have always given class time for students to begin to formulate their responses to the literature we discuss and then take those initial in context writings and add to them at home.

The authors go on to describe a Project Journal or PJ, which can be used for longer works, such as plays or novels. Students enter responses as they read. "The responses may be personal observations, questions, feelings, and even digressions. Reading student responses gives the teacher some idea of the thoroughness and the level of comprehension for the reader" (p. 64). The background given about these two journals is what I drew on to begin using this teaching tool in my classroom.

I made some changes to my journal assignments in the second year of my teaching career, most profoundly influenced by a small text called *Incredible Journeys* by Don Gutteridge, et. al., a handbook for teachers which outlines new approaches to the novel. One chapter in this handbook discusses the use of journals within the novel study unit. Gutteridge advocates the use of two types of responses within the Literature Journal – first impression personal responses and reflective responses. The first impression personal response, both prompted and unprompted, "will help capture

in a low-risk expressive format the students' ongoing interaction with the text, without unduly slowing or artificially skewing their natural attraction to the forward movement of the story" (p. 11). On the other hand, the reflective responses are often in the form of a brief but very specific moral question and are usually the final item to be completed by students in a sequence of questions and responses. "Unlike first impression prompts, reflective prompts follow sustained discussion and analysis, and act principally as a means of having students sum up or synthesize class responses from an individual perspective, of drawing issues and attitudes into the abmit of their own lives and relating them to their own social experience" (p. 16).

Interestingly enough, upon another read of this chapter, I discovered that Gutteridge acknowledges the work of Probst (1988), Protherough (1983) and Jackson (1982 and 1983) as the theorists whose experiments show the value of the use of expressive writing to record students' response to literature. I also discovered how many guidelines and suggestions I first borrowed from this text as I adapted the journal and reader response technique into my classroom and into my teaching style. I know this text is where I got the idea of first and second look responses, adapting Gutteridge's ideas of the value of an uninterrupted first response that is not clouded by anything other than the students' first reaction to the text. This response would then be followed by a second look response, which was their opportunity to reflect once again on the literature after a series of activities had been completed. I have used this revised format of reader's response for the last five years in my classroom.

However, one of the largest influences on my use of response writing in my classroom would have to be the work of Robert Probst (1988). I have read numerous articles he has written as well as his two books *Adolescent Literature: Response and Analysis* (1984) as well as *Response and Analysis: Teaching Literature in Junior and Senior High* (1988). No matter what other information I come across relating to reader's response to literature, the researcher almost always mentions Probst's works as an influence.

This last year, I was introduced to a new concept called metacognition or "thinking about thinking" which I have learned is an integral part of the students' learning processes. Intrigued by this new notion and the new Senior High English Language Arts Program of Studies emphasis on metacognition, I introduced a metacognitive journal into my classroom. As well, Jerry Wowk's work with response journals has reaffirmed my faith in these reflective and analytical assignments, as they

can be both a marking nightmare and a hard assignment to motivate students to keep up with and work hard at. During my thesis, I chose to adapt many of Jerry's approaches to the response journal, which vary just slightly from my own method and continue to use the metacognitive or learning journals to supplement my study.

The students who participated in my research study had completed response journals that were designed with many of the borrowed notions discussed earlier. I had introduced them to this method of response the year before. They were asked to read a piece or section of literature, jotting down any notions that may come to their mind as they read. These notes were referred to as "interactive notes" which encouraged the students to actively think and analyze as they were in the act of reading. Then, they were asked to write a journal response that contained both a summary of the critical aspects they had noticed and a personal response to the ideas presented by the author. After class discussion and activities, the students were then asked to write a second look response, which incorporated all of the new ideas they had learned from their peers and from the activities completed. This particular second look response tended to focus more on the critical than the personal.

During my research study, I asked the students to keep a reader's response journal. They were presented with Jerry's three part response format and we spent time discussing how this particular response format varies slightly from the expectations they have had in the past. After the class discussion and activities relating to the short stories chosen, they were able to use the graphic to guide their second look responses. These responses specifically asked them to focus on the significant idea of the entire work and the universal connection, omitting the second section relating to their personal response.

The journal also doubled as their research journals. I provided each student with a navy blue duotang containing lined paper. They were asked to keep all of the handouts they were provided during the unit as well as place all of their small, mixed and large group discussion notes in there as well.

I chose to use journals in this research project for two reasons. One, I had engaged in some email correspondence with two colleagues regarding the use of journals in the classroom and they provided me with some thought provoking observations. As well, the reading I was doing on gender uncovered many interesting insights about how boys and girls react to and learn from journal writing.

Gurian (2001) believes that boys, because they are much more action oriented

than girls, are much more comfortable acting on their feelings than talking about them, which does put them at a disadvantage in a response based approach to literature.

Bowman (1992) notes that girls are more likely to have kept diaries when they were young, encouraged by family and or friends. Therefore, girls would be more comfortable sharing their personal experiences with those around them. Boys, on the other hand, rarely keep journals for pleasure as they have been brought up to believe that they must be tough, keeping their problems, thoughts and concerns to themselves. Inherently, this difference in socialization may impact the success that boys and girls experience with journal writing. Appleby (1992) also warns that teachers need to acknowledge that there are distinct differences in the way men and women view and use journals and they must look at the background that students bring to their perceptions of journals. If teachers do not, he believes that it will be virtually impossible to get the desired responses from the students. Therefore, journals will not be used to their full potential.

In an analysis of boys and girls journals in her study, Bowman (1992) found that the girls' journal responses reflected "nurturing, patient, sharing individuals" whereas the boys' journal responses showed "very practical, judgmental and impatient people" (p. 87). Bowman feels that it is the responses drafted by the girls that far better represent the goals of a response centred curriculum. Bowman believes that the data from her study suggests that teachers must try to get boys to read and respond to literature more as the girls do, while still encouraging further growth in the girls' responses. Bowman states that the way to accomplish this type of response in boys and continued growth in girls is through the sharing of personal experiences in any form.

I asked Andrea if she used journals in her classroom and she indicated that she did. I then asked her about the success or failure she has noticed with them. She quickly indicated that the degree of success or failure has varied. She wrote that she doesn't "notice gender difference much, although girls tend to write more, and spend more time with the lit and what it means." She then shared that she has moved towards the response structure that Jerry Wowk has developed and she finds "that to be successful. It somehow frees the journal from being merely an exploration of feelings – his methods give the journals a structure that both boys and girls find successful."

I then queried whether or not she has noticed a difference in the way boys and

girls deal with and write in their journals. Is there a difference in attitude towards this assignment? Did she see them as a valuable learning tool in the classroom? She replied that she didn't:

> know if this is a gender thing. It's a matter of who does homework, and it's probably tied more closely to learning style than gender. Boys have a tendency to report, girls are more likely to play with feelings. In general boys in high school don't try as hard. Students who try hard write in the same way. I'm thinking about a group I had about three years ago – the boys and girls were equally strong and worked hard – the boys' journals were not distinguishable from the girls'.

Overall, Andrea believes that the journals can be "an effective learning tool for those students who use them effectively."

Instead of seeing a gender correlation, Andrea sensed that there was a mark correlation. "Those who have great journals also tend to do well in writing assignments. The thinking level is there, the speculation, the possibilities. Students who are conclusive writers – who arrive easily at answers and don't change their mind – don't do well with journals."

I asked Mark to comment about the use of journals in his classroom as well. He indicated that his "students don't have journals, but [he] does use 'journal writing' as one of many tools with each unit. I don't like calling them journals because most students have been journalled to death by the time they get to high school. We even have math and science teachers getting their students to do journals. I call such writing in my classes a variety of names such as SPICE responses and interactive logs."

Mark clearly stated that "Yes, [he does] notice a difference between the boys and the girls" when it comes to their journal responses. "As a rule, the girls write more. They become mini essays in that they appear relatively polished and well organized. The boys tend to take [him] at his word and they often give [him] writing that is off-the-cuff, spontaneous, unpolished, honest, direct and terse. This is not a complaint."

The Metacognitive Journal – A Supplementary Response Tool

In November of 1998, I was given the opportunity to work as a member of a Teacher's Advisory Committee as the work on the new Senior High English Language Arts Program of Studies began. It was here that I was first introduced to the notion of metacognition or "thinking about thinking." Metacognition was going to become a strong new focus of the program and I was intrigued as to how to introduce students to this very independent way of controlling and enhancing their own personal learning.

In the past, once students had completed their writing assignments, I would ask them to complete self-evaluation checklists, take part in peer editing and group editing. I would even ask them to self evaluate and reflect on the strengths and perceived weaknesses of their pieces prior to handing them in for evaluation. After the students received their evaluated piece, they would be required to reflect in a memo to me their perceptions of their piece after evaluation.

For reading, I had spent a great deal of time modeling strong reading behavior, encouraging students to read without interruption in silent reading periods, to highlight or take notes while they read, and of course, to learn strategies for tackling reading comprehension.

I guess in reflection I had been dealing with metacognition in my classroom in a variety of ways, but all of the activities were created and guided by me. I wanted to incorporate an assignment that would encourage the students to become the independent thinkers and learners that the new curriculum encouraged them to be.

I had been using a daily journal approach for a year prior to the beginning of my research project school year. Essentially, I believed that writing on a daily basis would help improve the fluency of my students' writing. Kirby and Liner (1988) also support my belief, stating that "Practice improves performance. Journals provide a place for writers to rehearse and to experiment with subject matter, voice and form. From these practices the seeds of essays, fiction, or poetry may sprout" (p. 62).

For these daily entries, I simply asked the students to reflect on what had occurred in the class that day. They could write about an interesting happening, an issue that was revealed which was personally meaningful or perhaps a simple reflection of what was accomplished. I did not want a simple summary of the class, minute by minute and I wanted the students to have at least two double spaced pages of writing. They did not have to worry too much about spelling and grammar as the

ideas were the focus of this assignment. As the course continued, I would ask the students to edit their work or try to be more aware of the technical aspects of their writing. These were the only guidelines I had given the students. I also guaranteed that they would receive fifteen minutes at the end of each class to begin their response, and if they were unable to finish, they were required to finish at home.

As my work on the Teacher Review Team for the new Senior High English Language Arts Program of Studies moved into a phase where we were providing feedback on the content of the program, I realized that I could transform my daily journal into a metacognitive sort of activity. The Senior High English Language Arts Program of Studies, Interim Draft (2001) states that "metacognition involves reflection, critical awareness and analysis, monitoring, and reinvention. Students who are engaged in metacognition recognize the requirements of the task at hand, reflect on the strategies and skills they may employ, appraise their strengths and skills, make modifications, and monitor subsequent strategies" (p. 2). Rather than having the students focus on 'what' they had learned or experienced in the classroom, I would have them focus their daily journal writing on 'how' and 'when' and 'why'.

This new journal focus was implemented as the English 20 students began their semester in my classroom. It took them some time to move away from the simple what of the classroom, but by the time the research project was introduced to them, the spirit of the assignment was certainly reflected in their journals. These metacognitive journals, or learning journals, have provided me with a great deal of data for my research – some that is even more valuable as thought provoking tidbits than the information I received in the formal activities I had planned. As Bowman (1992) indicated, these learning journals are invaluable because they provide students with an opportunity to write their feelings more openly, especially if they are unsure about sharing their ideas during class.

Chapter 5
The Students, the Group Work and the Classroom Discussions of Selected Literature

These stories were about myself, when I had grown a little older; they took place in a world that was recognizably mine, yet one that presented opportunities for courage, boldness and self-sacrifice as mine never did.
Alice Munro

After completing a variety of activities that allowed the students to share their notions of gender and learn a bit more about how their fellow students feel about gender issues, I took my students on a journey into the literature selections.

I chose to have the students work with "Boys and Girls" by Alice Munro first. I presented each student with a photocopied copy of the short story with the instruction to read the story at home that night and create a first look response, following Jerry Wowk's model, which I had taught them earlier in the unit.

Reader's Response – Initial Responses to "Boys and Girls"

Eight of the boys completed the assigned first look responses to the short story. Two of the boys, Aaron and Kurt, expressed their personal dislike of the story. Aaron indicated that this story was "not the most interesting story," while Kurt was much more blunt, expressing that he "thought that this story was pointless drivel and was a grueling experience to read." Flynn (1986) has observed that female readers tend to be more receptive to texts, trying to make meaning out of them before they pass some type of judgement. Here, it seems like these two boys are somewhat less receptive and much more judgmental, especially since these responses are their reactions to a first read. Only one of the boys, Sam, expressed a more positive attitude towards the story. Sam felt that "it was very interesting to read." The other five boys gave no indication in their response of their personal like or dislike of the story they read.

In their entries, the students were asked to identity the significant idea they felt the text was communicating to them. The common idea that the boys felt was communicated by the story centred on the idea of gender and how it can be restrictive. Aaron stated that "because of the main character's gender, she is restricted to the roles

of that gender" and Neil expressed the similar idea "your sex determines your role." Ethan worded his interpretation to read that "society today stereotypes actions to genders" and Sam felt that "everybody was forced to do what the gender actually did." Even Kurt, who expressed a dislike for the story, clearly stated that he felt "what is significant about the story is that her gender restricts her from pursuing anything of male status."

The entries written by the boys focussed on the narrator and her personal struggles with the other characters and the situations in the story. Many of them indicated that they felt the time period was the 1930's where this stereotyping would be common. The ideas they shared were centred on the notions of the girl wanting to live in a man's world, but being forced to accept herself as a girl. One exception was Norman, who spent a great deal of his entry discussing his perceived irony in the type of farm being run. He felt that "a fox farm…is seen definitely as man's work."

Two of the boys indicated in their journal entries that they were uncertain of the gender of the protagonist. Mac, "actually thought that she too was a boy" and Ethan "saw the narrator as a guy until about half way when the salesman said 'I thought it was only a girl.'" Aaron and Kurt believed that the point when the narrator truly understood that she was a girl and not a boy was when Laird pinned his sister. Aaron felt that "even though she was bigger than her brother it was a blow to her perception of who she would become."

Two of the boys mentioned the narrator's dreams of rescuing people and being heroic. Ethan felt that the details surrounding the narrator's dreams contributed to his confusion about the gender of the central character. Aaron, who opened his response by stating that the story was not the most interesting one he has read, stated two sentences later that he "found it interesting how the girl dreamed of herself as a hero and did not like the dull house work."

In the second part of the response, the students were asked to share their personal connections with the story. Three of the boys, Kurt, Aaron and Mason all discussed a bad experience in a home economics class. Aaron shared that he "was considered a bad cook because the females around me cooked better, so as a result, I have never taken home ec. again. I realized my role as a cook was no longer required." Mark shared similar sentiments, stating that "when I took Home Ec., I wasn't very good at it and neither were any of my male classmates. Today, none of those males are in Home Ec., which is stereotyped to be a woman's course." As well, Mason

described how when he was in home economics class he "had a difficult time. Nothing turned out and most of the food was either burnt, or just didn't taste good."

The average length of the boys' responses to the short story was three double spaced pages.

Nine of the girls completed the assigned first look responses to the short story. None of the girls indicated a specific dislike for the short story. Rachel even indicated in her response that she had chosen "the short story for my own free reading" for a bonus reading assignment earlier in the unit.

As the girls set out in the responses to articulate the idea they believed was significant, most of them focussed on what girls and boys are expected to do. As she discussed the slaughter of the horses, Barbara felt that the uncaring attitudes towards the act as expressed by the male characters is "what classifies men and women." Lauren noted that the gender issue centred on "the time period where women belonged in the kitchen and men outdoors bringing in the money to put food on the table" and Anna wrote that "back then women were supposed to stay in the house and be the stereotypical wife; housework." Kate expressed her notion of the significance of the story, believing that "the author is trying to show the progression from then and now and the gender-related expectations as they are changing." Ellen felt that the story details portrayed "a gender stereotype on what females are supposed to do in contrast to males."

As did the boys, the girls focussed their responses on the narrator and her struggles with the characters and the situations presented to her. One exception was Barbara, who focussed her entry on the senseless and sad slaughter of the horses.

Four of the girls, Amy, Ellen, Anna and Lisa shared the boys' comments relating to the gender of the protagonist. Amy indicated that she "began reading the story before I found out what the kid was I thought it was a boy" and Anna also noted that when she "began this story I thought these kids were boys because of the work they did." Ellen felt that "until it is actually stated that it is a girl, I would have never thought that way" and Lisa paralleled her comments, stating that "at first, I did not think that the child was a girl until it told me."

The most interesting pattern that was found in the girls' responses was their comments relating to the horses and the symbolism surrounding them. Each of the five girls who commented on the horses presented them as a symbol of freedom. Anna struggles with the symbol but works through her ideas, stating that "I know that there

is two horses for a reason that should symbolize something, but all I have is freedom." Barbara felt that "the letting go of the horse was a symbol of freedom but no man would care if that horse got to go free" and Lauren wrote that "by freeing the horse may also free the narrator inside by not actually having to through with it." Kate explained that "the horse is a symbol of freedom and the horse is a female. So by letting the horse go the girl foreshadows perhaps that her generation may be free to do more things than before." Amy also recognized that by letting Flora escape, she thought "this was foreshadowing." Only one of the boys commented on the symbolism of the horses. Mac stated that "when she ran over to close the gate, but opened it instead to let Flora to run free a bit, was a symbol of freedom."

The personal response sections written by the girls were widely varied, focussing on their response to specific ideas as well as personal experiences. Barbara shared her personal feelings about the death of the horses, stating that she feels "sorry for the horses" realizing that her "love could affect that but maybe not." Amy recalled an episode of *Little House on the Prairie* "when the father went to kill the horse and told the kids to stay away…on the T.V. show they'd be killing a sick or hurt animal and told the girls not to come along." Kate describes her mother "who is stuck in the traditional female role because she did not get a good education and because she is of another generation." Kate's mother believes that her daughter "should stay in the house, safe and clean, and help with household chores rather than help [her] dad outside with the cattle." She shares her distaste for being "all cramped up in the house with the intoxicating smells of cleaners or the heat from the stove", just as the narrator does. Lisa also shares her personal experience on the farm, noting that she too shared responsibilities with her two brothers. She stated that "this is a story that I can definitely relate to because that little girl was me."

The average length of the girls' responses to the short story was three double spaced pages – similar to that of the boys' responses.

Same Sex and Mixed Sex Groupings

The following day, I asked the students to form same sex groups of three or four. I allowed the students to make their own groups, knowing that they would work with those they felt most comfortable with. When the students created the groups, there were three all female groups and three all male groups. In these groups the

students were asked to share each first look response journal entries in order to find common ideas they wished to explore and elaborate on in this small group. A recorder was chosen to jot down the ideas shared by the group members, although all students were encouraged to jot down the notes. The students were given approximately 40 minutes to share their readings and discuss their chosen points.

Then, with approximately 30 minutes remaining, I had the six same sex groups mix to create three mixed sex groupings. Instead of giving them the choice, I asked the students to merge with groups of the opposite sex which were in close proximity to their own. They were then asked to share with each other the main points discussed by their same sex groups. The two recorders were asked to continue their role, jotting down the ideas they heard shared in this larger group situation.

There are a few reasons why I chose to have the students work in same sex and mixed sex groupings during the work in this unit. My reading on gender issues in the English classroom pointed out many differences in the way boys and girls learn as well as differences that occur when students work with those of their own gender and those of the opposite gender.

Gurian (2001) outlines many important brain differences between males and females that are the most essential to learning strategies. His research has provided me with a strong understanding of how males and females learn differently and why.

According to Gurian (2001) girls' brains mature earlier than boys' brains do and develop more quickly. This accounts for the girls' quicker acquisition of complex verbal skills, reading ability and vocabulary. Girls take in more sensory data than boys do, can control impulsive behavior better than boys, are less likely to take moral risks and rely heavily on verbal communication. Boys are more likely to physically show some form of natural aggression, are less able to verbalize their feelings, are impulsive, and rely heavily on silent, non-verbal cues to successfully communicate. As well, the development of the boys' brain provides them with better spatial abilities than girls, which accounts for their strengths in measuring, mechanical design, geography and map reading.

Hormones also play a specific role in the abilities of males and females to learn effectively. For example, when a female's estrogen level is high, a girl tends to score higher on standardized tests and when a male's testosterone level is high, a boy tends to perform well on spatial tasks and poorly on verbal tasks.

A complex difference between the male and female brain is a functional

difference. Boys use the right hemisphere more than the left, and girls are exactly the opposite. Because of this, boys tend to move emotionally laden material down from the limbic system into the brain stem where the flight or fight responses are stored, whereas girls move more of it upward to the upper brain where more complex thinking occurs. I found this particular piece of brain research very interesting, especially in light of my whole desire to have the literature touch the passions and emotions of my students. Will this happen for all my boys in light of this new awareness of the brain's function?

As well, research has shown that the resting female brain is as active as the activated male brain. Essentially what this means is that the female brain is using its resources, doing so very quickly and often in many more places in the brain – it is never truly at rest – which has to translate into a learning advantage for girls.

Gurian (2001) continues by discussing the ways in which boys and girls respond to stimuli. He states that a girl's response to stimuli is far more complex than a boy's response. Because the boy's brain is not as active, it will easily become overwhelmed by the amount of stimuli and decide which components are most important in order to complete the task at hand, and will ignore the rest. Boys are very task focussed and like to stick to a plan. Girls can respond much more quickly to greater amounts of stimuli, and tend to connect them with personal relationships and communication. Girls can store a great deal of seemingly random information for short periods of time, whereas boys tend to store trivia for long periods of time. Boys can deal with seemingly random information if it can be organized in some logical fashion or has some significant importance to them.

Boys tend to be deductive in their reasoning and creation of concept awareness whereas girls tend to be inductive. This essentially means that girls build from specific examples to a general theory whereas boys work from the general theory and then apply it to specific examples or cases. As well, males tend to be more abstract thinkers and females tend to be more concrete thinkers.

As language users, Gurian (2001) notes that during the learning process, girls tend to use words as they learn while boys tend to work silently. Girls also produce more words than males, which was noticeable in a learning group study. Girls also tend to prefer to have ideas presented in usable, every day language, whereas boys find jargon much more interesting.

As listeners, girls perform much better. They hear more of what is said in a

lesson and this gives them a learning advantage. Boys tend to hear less and often want clear evidence to support ideas shared by any person in the classroom.

Appleby (1992) summarizes research that shows girls do much more of the conversation work then boys do. They ask two and a half times more questions than boys do, even though boys do seem to control the choice of topic in the discussion. Weikel (1995) also notes that in classroom discussions girls' speaking turns are the longest and they specifically use stories from their personal experiences in order to support or clarify their ideas.

According to Appleby (1992), boys account for approximately 96% of all the interruptions during small group discussion. They will interrupt females three times more often than other males. Weikel (1995) raises the point that the interruptions are often boys' attempts to offer contrasting ideas or to challenge the idea of another student, most often a boy.

In the area of group dynamics, Gurian (2001) indicates that cooperative learning skills tend to be easier for girls to master in its early stages of use, primarily because girls learn while they attend to codes of social interaction. Boys are much more task-oriented and focus on doing the task presented well, without much sensitivity to those around them. Gurian (2001) does note that girls and boys do both benefit from learning teams and group work, but when boys form groups, they tend to be more structured, while the girls form looser organizations. Girls spend time on group processes much more than boys do. Boys are focused on picking a team leader quickly and then moving on to achieving the goal.

Grossman (1994) mentions that boys in all boy groups more often interrupt each other, using commands, threats and boasts of authority. Head (1996) adds that the nature of boys' discourse is marked by boys tending to assert their points of view and ignore the thoughts or ideas of others. On the other hand, Grossman (1994) states that girls in all girl groups more often express agreement with another speaker, will pause to give another girl a chance to share ideas and will acknowledge ideas shared by others when starting a speaking turn.

I found these stark differences fascinating and wanted to do some observing for these behaviors. I also could not help but wonder how the same sex or mixed sex groupings of students affects their appreciation and understanding of the literature being studied. Is there a grouping that works best for students to gain insight into the literature? Does understanding and appreciation of literature depend on the nature of

the literature or the nature of the grouping of students?

My observations of the students in these two grouping situations seemed to match what the researchers have documented in most cases. My observations ended up being focussed on one group of boys, and one group of girls.

In the all male group, consisting of Norman, Will and Neil, the three boys were especially combative and loud. Will and Neil continually challenged and mocked Norman's ideas, constantly putting Norman on the defensive. However, the all girl group beside them, consisting of Nan, Lauren and Kate, behaved much differently. There was more turn taking going on and a great deal of acceptance of ideas. Any disagreements were polite, acknowledging that the idea had merit, but that not everyone was in agreement. Because of the differences I noticed in these two groups, I purposely decided to use proximity as the criteria for putting together the mixed group scenario to see what would happen then.

The results were very unexpected. The two boys, Neil and Will, who were so loud and challenging in the same sex group, completely withdrew and became very quiet in the mixed group. The only comments Will made were ones that contained humour and attempted to drag the group off task. Will returned to his role as a recorder, removing himself from the conversation when the girls shared, but continued his mocking of Norman whenever he spoke. Norman maintained his participation level once the girls were a part of the group, often talking over them or attempting to interrupt their ideas. Lauren was politely accepting of Norman's ideas, but often offered an alternate interpretation.

After about ten minutes had passed, Norman became defensive, as he did in his same sex group, repeating himself over and over, raising his voice, and over gesturing in the attempt to be heard. Interestingly, Norman never budged from his ideas or his interpretations, no matter how much the girls tried to nurture him in another direction, or no matter how much his fellows males mocked him.

Wanting to know what the students' perceptions were of same sex and mixed sex groupings, I turned to their metacognitive learning journals to see what their comments were about working in these group situations.

Interestingly, many of the students' comments are supported by Grossman (1994) who notes that "females and males learn and remember better information that is relevant to their gender roles" (p. 23).

Kate was excited about the whole notion that group situations may influence

the interpretation of a piece of literature. She shared that the boys "mentioned the significance of the little brother's name, Laird. Our group, which was completely girls to begin with did not even think of looking up the name. We centred more on the relationships of the girl and her father and the girl and her mother." Kate also mentioned that "girls seem to usually have a lot to say whereas guys…usually sit back and listen more to what others have to say." Nan, another member of Kate's group, also shared her feelings that "every topic pretty much was initiated by the girls and then discussed by both the boys and girls."

Nan then went on to share how arguments seemed to occur once the girls moved from the same sex grouping into the mixed sex grouping. Alison also noted how much disagreement occurred once her all female group mixed with a group of boys. She felt that the father treated the daughter quite rudely at the close of the story, while one of the boys felt the daughter deserved to be treated that way. As well, the same boy felt that the narrator, "revealed her new self as a girl and realized who she was" while Alison "thought that she just went through a change in attitude but always knew who she was. It's not like she thought she was a boy or anything."

Anna's experience with same sex and mixed sex groupings led her to say that she found it "reassuring that when the guys are putting their ideas out for talking they looked for reassurance that someone felt the same way. They are nervous about sharing their thoughts as well."

Many of the girls mentioned that they were surprised at how many ideas discovered and discussed in their same sex groupings were often the same as the ones shared once they became a part of a mixed group. They may not have always agreed on their significance, but both boys and girls seemed to be able to distinguish the key details of the literature.

In general, the boys had very little to say about working in groups. Many of the boys indicating how easy working in groups was, both for their same sex groupings as well as the mixed sex groupings. Four of the boys noted in their metacognitive journals how similar the ideas were in both the same sex and mixed sex groupings, creating a lot of repetition in the discussion. Kurt best represents the boys' comments, noting that "our opposite sex groups worked rather well and did not even argue over anything." However, many of the boys mentioned being off task quite often during the discussion times given to the groups. Aaron confessed that during the mixed sex groupings, the members "pretty much agreed with each other and had no

disagreements. The discussion often broke down, and the topic changed to other events that happened." He goes on to note that the girls seemed to be the ones who "enjoyed talking about other subjects."

Neil stated that he liked the mixed sex grouping better than the same sex grouping as there were "more ideas bounced off each other and there were more people contributing to the discussion."

After these experiences with the groups, the students went away and returned the following day to discuss the assigned short story in a round table format.

The Practice of Round Table Discussion

I do not know where I first got the idea to have the students enter into what I call a round table discussion. At one of the meetings that I attended as a member of the Teacher Review Team, a teacher who is a department head in a central Alberta high school made a comment that I believe sparked the beginnings of my desire have students do more talking in my room. He made the comment that as teachers, we need to change our practice to reflect the idea that we are not just a "sage on the stage, but a guide on the side." The other comment he made was a simple one, but really made me reflect about practice in my room. He said, "if learning occurs when questions are asked, why are the teachers the ones asking the questions?"

Armed with these two philosophical statements, I decided to see what I could do to allow the students in my room more freedom to explore their ideas and notions rather than my predetermined ones.

The round table discussion format I use in the classroom is designed to attempt to capture different aspects of the way males and females share ideas. All students are encouraged to participate, although I do not consider it to be mandatory enough to stop the discussion and encourage the reluctant speakers. The discussion is somewhat freewheeling and can turn to a debate style, which Kleinfeld and Yerian (1995) indicate favors the discussion styles of males. Other times, the discussion ends up being more like what Kleinfeld and Yerian (1995) describe as collaborative talk, where people build on the ideas of others. This particular discussion style favors females. Essentially, the students are in charge of the discussion style that emerges, and with both male and female discussion leaders, I believe that the two styles are well represented in each round table discussion.

In order for this round table discussion format to be successful in my classroom, I share a few key components with my students. All students must arrange their desks in a circle. The entire room is transformed so students can all see each other and essentially "talk" to each other and either share or debate ideas about the literature we are studying. The teacher, being myself, is removed from the circle. Pace and Townsend (1999) refer to this type of process as creating a dialogic classroom which they believe is a valuable goal for teachers of literature. As "students are genuinely responsible for learning how to figure things out, teachers may be invited to discover the text anew." (p. 48). I told my students that the only people who could share were the ones in the circle. This meant that I would not be sharing any pieces of information or asking any questions as they worked through the literature. Now, relinquishing this sense of control over the learning was a very difficult thing to do at first. One of the boys, Mac, even suggested that he would take bets beginning at $20, not believing that I would not be able to keep quiet during the class discussion. As humorous as the comment was, it was also something that I felt I needed some time to reflect on. Do my students see my interruptions or musings in discussions helpful or not?

I also spend some time talking to the students about turn-taking, telling them that they have to devise some method of sharing that allows all voices to be heard with few interruptions and very little "overtalking."

This particular group of students grew quite fond of this method of classroom discussion quite quickly. In the short story unit that preceded this project the discussions became lively right from the beginning. Often, as a student would share an idea, he or she would continue to look at me, seated in the back of the room, looking for some validation of his or her tentative interpretations. I had to learn to listen but not shake my head, smile or twitch as I wanted the validations for the ideas to come from the students and not from me.

Just a couple of weeks prior to the start of this project, the students were given an 80-minute class to discuss Alice Munro's short story "Day of the Butterfly." The discussion became so detailed and the students became so involved in the smallest nuances of the story that they asked for a 40 minute extension the following day to continue sharing their ideas. The quieter I became in my classroom, the less of the "master" of literature persona I shared in my classroom, the more independent the students became. They were the ones in charge of their learning, not me. It was an

enlightening teaching experience that will certainly affect my teaching practice and one I could not ignore in this project.

Now that the students had explored gender and had worked in same sex and mixed group settings, it was time to see how they worked together to deal with literature that had strong gender roles and made some strong comments about gender expectations. Could they work together to come to an understanding and appreciation of the literature I had selected? Would their genders allow for insights and perspectives that would aid in their learning? Or, would their genders cause some difficulties in interpretation and appreciation?

"Boys and Girls" – Discussion of the Short Story

After the students had settled into their round table discussion circle, I sat back and allowed the discussion to begin. Interestingly enough, the two strongest classroom discussion leaders, Lauren and Norman, were absent this day. I believe that a great deal of the elements of the discussion, as well as the interesting shift that occurred, happened because there were more than the normal student voices being heard in that classroom.

The discussion began quite tentatively, especially since the instigators were absent. However, Rachel took the initiative and shared with the class how she "first thought the narrator was male." Mac quickly jumped in and said that he knew right away that the narrator was female because of all the complaining the mom had done about not having the narrator in the house. For the first half of the 80 minute class, the discussion continued to centre on the students' perceptions and interpretations of the short story, based on their own initial understandings and the ideas generated and shared in the groups. The boys shared 19 comments and the girls shared 59 comments.

There were some interesting patterns that seemed to emerge in the first half of the discussion, which specifically focussed on the short story. The boys in the class entered into the discussion early, focussing the majority of their interpretations in very particular areas – symbolism, irony and character interpretation. Mason shared how the brother had pinned the narrator, which was a "blow to her perception of who she was…a coming of age." Will then shared how he believed that the narrator was scared of all the stuff in the attic. Mac jumped in and focussed on the irony

surrounding the town name of Jubilee, having looked it up in the dictionary discovering that "there wasn't really much to celebrate" in the story.

The comments continued, with ideas about the symbolism of the blood, the horse slaughter, Laird's name, the song "Danny Boy." and some mention of the narrator being suppressed, wanting to be free and perhaps even wanting to be a male. It is important to note that the majority of the ideas shared by the boys focussed on the male characters or events that would be considered "male" as well on elements that were not in any way gender specific, like the town name. Only 7 of the 19 comments were made specifically about the female characters or the events that surrounded them. When the boys did make comments related to the narrator or the other female characters, they lacked elaboration. Neil recalled that the narrator seemed to "rebel against the proper way of sitting" and Aaron commented that her "emotions separate her from the man's world" but neither boy shared any more in relation to those ideas. In one of the few comments directly linked to the narrator, Will even appeared to poke fun at her, by commenting how ridiculous it was that she was "afraid of the lino" on the floor.

Looking at the sharing patterns the boys displayed, very few comments made by the boys either created or continued discussion. Once the boys shared their idea, they moved on to another one. For example, Ethan shared how when Mac was killed it was the death of the narrator's boyish side and when she lets Flora go she becomes a female. There were no comments made by any of the other boys that showed they accepted his idea, there were no reassurances to Ethan that he was correct and the idea was not elaborated on by any other boy. Directly after this comment, Aaron just jumped right in and started talking about the song "Danny Boy." In my notes, there are tons of breaks on the boys' comments, showing how many new topics they shared. There is only one occasion, later in the discussion, where a boy made a comment in direct response to an idea shared by another one of the boys. One boy noted that the father probably wanted to make the narrator a boy so he wouldn't be alone on the farm. Mason jumped right in and noted that the father wasn't alone because he had Laird. Then, Mac noted that Laird was too young to be considered a partner for the father.

The most interesting occurrence followed the comments made by Aaron about the song "Danny Boy." He talked about how the lyrics could be a foreshadowing of the end of her dreams and a recognition of who she had become. Following these

comments, the boys, as a group, disappeared from the discussion, turning it almost exclusively over to the girls. The girls, after this point, took the discussion and focussed it very specifically on the narrator, trying to determine her motivation and relationships with the other characters in the story.

The girls' comments began with a discussion of the narrator's gender. The girls also shared their interpretations of the horses, both the slaughtered Mac as well as Flora, the horse who runs through the gate she opens. Both Anna and Rachel agreed that the horses represented the narrator at various stages in her life. Mac is who she is when the story begins and when he dies, she becomes Flora, whose dreams of boyhood die as does Flora. The girls also talked about the symbolism of the foxes, as well as the narrator's relationships with her brother, mother and father. It is important to note that 40 of the comments made by the girls on these topics centred on the narrator and the events that surrounded her.

There were many comments made by the girls that linked back to some of the pre-discussion activities relating to gender expectations. Kate mentioned that when the mother felt like she did not have a daughter at all, that the story was pointing at the expectations of girls at that time who were needed by their mothers inside. Anna added how it was tradition for the oldest male child to inherit the land. When Barbara shared what she felt was the significance of the phrase "she is just a girl," Kate jumped in and said that the phrase did not surprise her as back then, girls were not valued. Kate later shared that the horses, Mac and Flora, "had stereotyped male and female characteristics, which reflected the time period." Mac was the workhorse, and work was the main role of men then. Rachel then shared her disgust of the imagery surrounding the naked slippery foxes being slaughtered, saying that it was "gross – this is the man's stereotyped world." She also added how the lack of talk that occurred between the narrator and her father was an acceptable part of the relationship because that is a guy's thing.

The one aspect of the girls' sharing in the discussion that was noticeably absent from the boys' sharing was the affirmations and encouragements that occurred. Barbara, a hardworking, yet somewhat reluctant sharer, once started to share her idea, but changed her mind. Kate encouraged Barbara to speak and share the idea she was trying to. Rachel asked the group what the name of the narrator was, as a rhetorical question, involving the group as she moved into her point about why the author would want the narrator nameless. Later, Kate also asked the group whether or not they

believed the antagonist was the mother. During comments made about the significance of the color silver in relation to the foxes, Barbara affirmed the ideas shared by saying "that makes sense." Again, Lisa asked Barbara why she believed that the house had been divided into male and female areas. She also asked the group about Laird's age, wondering if there was any significance here.

Overall, the girls shared significantly more ideas than the boys did in relation to the short story. There were large sections in my notebook where the girls took the ideas from one another and expanded on them. For example, a whole page and a half of my notes were devoted to comments about the relationship the narrator has with her mother and her father. Four girls, Kate, Rachel, Lisa and Anna shared and built on each others ideas relating to the mother's place not being in the barn, the way the mother and daughter spoke to each other, how the daughter saw the mother as an enemy plotting against her. As well the girls discussed how the mother always seemed to talk to the narrator, which did not help the relationship, but the father hardly spoke and there seemed to be respect there. The girls seemed to be having a conversation or discussion, whereas the boys seemed to just be engaged in a session where they shared their idea and moved on to the next.

When the boys shared an idea, they were willing to move to the next topic; however, the girls seemed to take their ideas and do the elaboration for them. When Mac introduced the notion that Laird's name meant landowner, Barbara repeated the word landowner, and then Anna added that the "male always inherits land…[so it] falls into place." No where in my notes, with the exception of the elaboration mentioned previously did the boys take their ideas further once they were shared. The boys did do some elaboration when the girls shared a specific idea. For example, when Kate asked who the group felt was the antagonist, Aaron responded that he felt the antagonist was the "people who want her to be female." However, their elaborations did lack specificity and detail. It was significantly easier to transcribe the words the boys shared and difficult to transcribe the words the girls shared, simply because of the amount that was being said by each gender.

"Boys and Girls" – Shift to a Discussion of Gender

As interesting as the discussion details and patterns were for the first half of the class, an almost astounding shift occurred with about 40 minutes of the 80 minute class remaining. It was unexpected, but certainly gave me many things to think about and helped me make some decisions about the remainder of the project, particularly relating to the choice of interview/questionnaire subjects.

As the discussion on the story began to wind down a bit, Rachel asked the question, "what is the theme?" There was some silence in the room as the students sat and thought about the theme. Neil, sitting close to me, muttered something under his breath. I reminded him to speak clearly as all ideas are valuable. He then looked at the group, who were relatively silent and shifting in their seats, battling with the notion of theme, and said "all this stuff is biased. Our responses may be conditioned to be more female." All of a sudden, the story fell into the background as the students in the room began a discussion of gender and the English Language Arts classroom.

The first idea that was shared came from the boys. Mason felt that "we" referring to boys, may say an idea in a way that may offend a female teacher. He indicated that boys worry about saying something sexist that will offend their female teacher, which would ultimately lead to a poor mark. Aaron agreed with Mason, saying that boys say more what is expected of them and will "not say what we feel because of a 'huge assed' bias…getting burnt when they say" something that could be deemed offensive or against the belief of the teacher or others. Mason continued with this idea saying that in many cases if there "was something there, we may not say it to not offend" the teacher. Kate jumped in and asked the boys if they really thought that a male teacher would not get offended as well. She did not agree that being offended was something that could only happen to a female teacher. However, Rachel did seem to agree somewhat with the boys' comments, noting that girls can discuss ideas openly and boys often can't or won't.

Then, Kate asked the boys (interestingly, the questions were directed to the boys at this point) if they thought "a male teacher would choose different stuff" and if they would then do better in English class. She noted that "the curriculum is the same." She went on to comment that science and math seem more geared towards boys, so why wouldn't they excel there and girls, in turn, would excel more in English. She noted that girls "are more expressive."

Neil then shared his belief that changes are being made in course curricula to suit girls. Personally, he likes "answers that are right and wrong." Rachel shared her summary of an article she read which indicated that females were doing better in math and science. However, she noted that the courses seem to be written by males for males, which is a vicious cycle. It is here that she felt that the content is reflected by the gender of the creator. Mason, quite emphatically, tried to explain why he felt the way he did, but couldn't put it into words. Will tried to help by saying that "guys can't passionately write about butterflies." Many of the boys nodded in agreement and one even indicated that boys can't write passionately about anything. Lisa then quipped, "what about hockey?" Neil and Will responded to her question saying "yes, because it relates to me" and because it is something "we care about."

Mason then continued to share his frustrations, saying that very little in English comes clearly, no matter what is being symbolized. Kate immediately responded by pointing out how expressive his poem on curling was and how well the poem turned out. However, Rachel then added that for boys it is "not masculine to talk about yourself" and Anna then said if the boys were reading a story with a hockey stick as a symbol instead of a butterfly they would get it as the symbol would be more relevant to them. Interestingly, Mason did not agree with Anna's comment.

Mason continued to share his feelings about this new shift in the discussion by noting how difficult it is to find something to write about in response to literature. He compared English to math. He knows what to do in math because there is a formula and a place to start. As well, there is a definite answer that is correct. Kathy then asked Mason if he felt "forced, because of the expectations of the English course and the teacher, to make assumptions you normally wouldn't?" She asked a second question, wondering if he only makes assumptions for the mark? Aaron answered the question first, noting that he doesn't want to look like a fool if his idea is wrong or not well supported. Mason then answered Kate by saying that after he finds an idea he is not comfortable. He is unsure so he just writes his response to finish, not necessarily to do a good job. Rachel then asked Mason if he did better on the paragraphs they had created where they had a choice of what ideas they wished to develop. Mason did not verbally reply, he just shook his head and laughed.

Kate then asked the boys, in general, if they felt they would do better in English if they had a male English teacher. Mac noted that males teach math and science and was unsure if it would be different because they had no previous

experience with this situation. Aaron added that a male English teacher would probably be deep like Norman (who was notably absent). The class did laugh together with this comment. Kate added to Aaron's comment, believing that a male teacher would be more emotional than a typical male, breaking male boundaries. She also felt that this would be a good quality to have. Mason felt that a male English teacher would be able to explain ideas better from a guy's point of view. Rachel agreed, believing that since girls already excel because of the nature of the course that boys would learn better and their grades would improve. Mac added that he believed girls' achievement could go down in time if all they were exposed to was a male English teacher. Mason seemed to agree more with Rachel, saying that the boys' marks would end up higher but the girls' marks wouldn't drop.

Kate then shared what she noted immediately was her own personal way of approaching any course. She feels the need to please all of her teachers, male or female. She said that she does this for herself and her parents. She wants equally as good a mark, regardless of the course. Darren indicated that he believes that the relationship you have with the teacher determines the way you work. If the relationship is good, you don't want to disappoint the person. Aaron agreed, noting that you don't want to let a friend down. He shared his feelings for a colleague of mine who teaches outdoor education. This teacher is into the things the boys are, creating a bond. The boys want to keep their relationship with this male teacher in a positive light.

Mac then reiterated that the relationships formed between girls and boys are different. Girls talk, boys don't. Male bonds are formed by the ball hats they wear. Aaron believes that males teach what he calls instructional courses and females teach more interpretive courses. Social Studies and English are close, but in social studies, all you have to do is regurgitate information, where in English, you have to interpret. Kate agreed, noting that in English, there are many gray areas – there is no set way. Rachel added that in English the hardest thing is figuring out a place to start. If you have a 60% mark, it is difficult to improve your mark. Seeing, analyzing and interpreting are difficult skills and she believes that you need a good English teacher. She did not mention whether a good English teacher would be a male or a female.

Mason continued the discussion by talking about the clashes that occur between teacher and English student. Mason added that he may see a symbol, but the teacher doesn't. This could affect the mark if the teacher is open or closed-minded.

Will expressed his frustration at having to find support and explain everything. Mason agreed, believing that finding the support and explaining ideas fully is not something that comes naturally to males. Aaron indicated that he felt all the thinking hard and looking deeply was crazy. There is not meaning in everything. Mason wholeheartedly agreed with him, believing that not all the ideas we talk about in class are significant. He believes that the authors do not make as much of the stories as we do and he is being forced to see more than what is actually there. Kate then asked the boys if they thought all the details and length of "Boys and Girls" was there because the author was female? Mason shared his belief that we spend so much time looking deeply at the stories that when a short one comes along, you won't hear the boys complain. Lisa had the last word on this discussion, believing that the boys set themselves up. She felt that because the story was about a girl, immediately the boys tuned out and didn't really care enough to look closely at the story. Because it didn't relate to them, they looked at the story differently. As the bell rang to end the class, the boys all acknowledged their agreement to her comments.

The conversation did not end with the bell. As the students were leaving the classroom, three boys, Mason, Mac and Neil lingered behind. They had more on their mind. Mason told me that he did not believe that I marked papers differently according to gender, but that my expectations for the boys were higher. As a conclusion to her study, Gabriel (1990) states that "we as male and female teachers will have to acknowledge that we are bringing our own influential 'frames of reference' to our reading of literature, as well as to our reading of student papers" (p. 138). The three boys echoed this same idea to me. They felt that the way they write comes from a male background and perspective. They believed that I evaluated from my female background and perspective so I would miss things or evaluate on a set of criteria that didn't match their writing. They believed that my 'female' perspective missed their 'male' ideas.

Before he left the class, I asked Neil what prompted him to share his initial comment that created the discussion shift. He told me that he had been thinking about this whole idea of being conditioned to read stories like a girl since the beginning of the project and had mentioned the idea in an earlier metacognitive journal entry. Flipping through his journal, I found his comment – "I'm not sure you could accurately do your thesis" he began. "I think the students opinions may be biased because of the fact that as far as I know they all have been taught by only a female

teacher." Randall (1987) clearly states that most teachers who may be unhappy at the suggestion that they could be contributing to sex-stereotyping want to feel that they do treat all students equally and provide them with equal opportunities. However, the students come into their room having been subjected to years of socialization, and by attempting to treat students as individuals, many sex stereotypes are inadvertently reinforced. I guess in Neil's case, his previous female English teachers had shaped many of his notions of English language arts and although I thought I was creating opportunities for my boys to excel, I was just reinforcing those stereotyped notions for him.

Interestingly, the boys, who made significantly fewer comments during the discussion that focussed specifically on the story, made many more comments related to the discussion of gender and the English classroom than the girls did. The boys made 30 comments, whereas the girls made 18 comments. The ideas the boys shared during this half of the discussion were full of detail and specificity – traits lacking when they discussed the short story.

Reflections on the Literature Discussion

Intrigued by the whole discussion that occurred surrounding this short story, I could not wait to look at the metacognitive learning journals to see what reflections the students had about their experiences in the class. In reading all of the entries written by the students, they certainly had some perceptions to express about gender and the English Language Arts classroom.

All of the girls had interesting comments to make relating to the shift in the discussion that had occurred. Many of their comments seemed to be sweeping generalizations, laden in stereotype, while other comments appeared to be somewhat more insightful.

Rachel believed that if the class was taught by a male teacher, "the guys would respond better to the male's way of teaching and since females are naturally better at English, they would excel just as much as previous." She also thought that "guys find it hard to express themselves, because they have never needed to, thus making English hard…all males have either had criticism or were brought up on the belief that English was for girls." Nan agreed with Rachel, indicating that in her mind, the "only reason why girls are better in the English class is because we are better at expressing

ourselves."

Anna also had a great deal to share about the discussion that occurred. Her thoughts on having a male English teacher show that she believes "that he would somewhat adjust certain things, like some of the stories read in class. He may choose something more to his liking like [I] do on occasion. This in turn would help the males of the class to relate and enjoy the literature read but would put the girls at a disadvantage. So, in a way I think this may be why the girls often exceed in English; the course is dominated by female teachers that set the curriculum."

Kate seemed to have more questions than answers. She pondered whether or not it is "just a coincidence that males excel in subjects that are usually taught by males and females excel at subjects taught generally by women?"

Taking a different look at the issue, Alison stated that she did not "necessarily believe what was said…when they said that English was designed for girls and science and math are designed for guys." She indicated that she is better at math because she likes to just tackle a question and get an answer. "English, on the other hand, is harder for me because sometimes you have to write about something that you don't necessarily believe." She wrote that she finds it hard to express her feelings on a subject and uses the example of the poetry writing workshop done earlier in the year, where she believes the boys' poems were far more descriptive and emotional than hers was. As for a male English teacher in the classroom, Alison did not think it would change anything for the boys. If the male was an English teacher, "he probably has an easier time finding literary terms and he would obviously enjoy reading many types of literature." Alison told me in the entry that she believes I provide an "equal selection of literature in regards to gender." Alison finished her lengthy journal response wondering how a male teacher would be able to explain to the boys a story about girls. Interestingly, she did not mention if there would be any difficulty with a female attempting to explain to other females a story centred on a male.

Barbara shared Alison's feelings, believing that the reason "that guys do well in your course is because you really think about what stories guys would like and girls would like." She wondered whether or not this was something I did on purpose, and how interesting it would be if I didn't.

Two of the girls, Ellen and Kate, noticed that the boys, especially Mason and Aaron, dominated the discussion once the topic shifted. Ellen offered the explanation that the boys "were expressing something that was very important to them." She

believes boys "have a lot to say, they just don't feel like it's appropriate or that it's something that should be mentioned." In regards to the question of a male English teacher, she believes that "an English teacher is an English teacher. They all find literary elements and all different archetypes that can be found in that piece of literature. It doesn't matter what gender the teacher is, it matters how the teacher is to their students." She went on to qualify this comment, stating that the difference between a male and female English teacher would be the way he or she relates to his or her students. Both the male and the female teacher are in the classroom for the same reason – they enjoy looking at literature.

Lisa supported Ellen's thoughts, revealing that she believes:

> teachers are taught to explain and teach things in a certain way. [Mason] said that a female would not be able to explain something really good so the boys understand. I do not think that that is true. A female teacher can turn it and explain something the way a boy could understand. I do not think that gender is or should be a problem or an issue. I think that once you get to know a teacher, no matter what gender, you will have more respect and are able to talk more. Therefore, communication between the students and the teachers is important.

The boys made fewer comments in their journals, perhaps because they had expressed themselves quite thoroughly in the class discussion. Again, like the girls, some of the comments seem to be generalizations that do fall into the category of stereotype. For example, Kurt said that he "can see a male teacher being less competent about his job, and picking different stories." Aaron believes that a male English teacher would probably have the same thought process" that he has and would be able to explain things in a way he could understand. As well, a male English teacher" probably wouldn't pick stories like "Trip for Mrs. Taylor" or "Anointed with Oils." Aaron clearly stated how he likes a story with a plot – with somebody actually trying to accomplish something. "Not some old lady riding a train to satisfy her psychological needs. The male mind is saying get a life." In a later response, Aaron was quite blunt regarding his feelings towards the story "Boys and Girls." He clearly expressed that "The short story "Boys and Girls", was a load of crap. All it was a bunch of [whining]. OOO, she can not do [men's] work any more because she is a

girl. It had no solid plot and it rambled for too long."

Neil, who started the whole discussion relating to gender and the classroom said that he could not "say for sure that the gender of an English teacher affects the way a student thinks" because he has only ever been taught by females. He then tells me that he agreed with the comment Aaron made during the discussion about saying things that could offend the teacher. "I was going to put chick teacher but you are offended at that so I didn't and this just proves my point."

Mac believes that it would be easier to relate to a male English teacher and used a personal example to support his belief. "I know at home when mom tries to explain something I don't usually understand but when Randy explains the same thing I understand better."

The most outspoken person during the entire class discussion, Mason, wrote very little in his journal. He did indicate at the end of his entry how glad he was that Neil "changed the conversation the way he did or else it would have been a very boring class."

Darren had many comments to make relating to this subject. He believed that the gender of the teacher determines the kind of literature that is studied. He believed that the "literature studied in an English course directly relates to what the teacher is interested in…and what the teacher is interested in depends on whether they are male or female." He also had a lot of criticism about his experiences in English class. He has felt "forced to read stories I don't like to read so I can pass English." He tells me that when he says that comment to the girls in the class, they disagree, liking most of the literature they have encountered. However, he revealed to me that the other males he has talked to about this feel the same way he does. "Most of the males feel forced to read literature they do not like in order to pass." He finished his entry by telling me how unfair this was.

"Boys and Girls" – Film Version

The following day, I showed my students the film version of "Boys and Girls" produced by the National Film Board, starring Megan Follows as the narrator. As the film short was being viewed, I asked the students to jot down in their research journals any details that "struck them." Then, after viewing, I had them write a spontaneous response, following the direction provided by Probst (1982) for about 15 minutes.

Then, I asked the students to rejoin their same sex groupings and gave them two specific questions to address. One, I wanted the students to discuss in what ways the film does or does not capture the intent of Munro's story and two, I wanted the students to discuss how the film deals with the gender issues brought forth by the short story. After about 15 minutes, I asked the students to then form the mixed sex groupings of before and discuss their ideas. This time, the mixed sex groupings lost their focus quickly, with a great deal of off topic discussion occurring until the bell rang to end the class.

The following day, I asked the students to form their round table and discuss their impressions and interpretations of the film. In general, the students were very critical of the film version, feeling it did not capture Munro's intent thoroughly enough.

Lauren began the conversation by stating how much she didn't like the film. She was particularily unimpressed about the way the narrator's and the mother's relationship was portrayed. In the story, she felt their relationship was much more negative and filled with some degree of hate. Norman agreed, stating that the narrator had a relationship with her mother that she seemed to enjoy rather than resent. Lauren also felt that the movie was contradictory. The narrator looked in the mirror, seemingly accepting the inevitable and then at the end stated "they can't catch me."

Norman then commented on the narrator having a name in the film – Margaret. He felt this name was "very feminine" and wondered why the director did not choose a name like Jess or Jessie, which could have a male or female connotation. Aaron interpreted the choice of Margaret as an appropriate old-fashioned name. Neil commented that because all the other characters had names, the girl, having a name in the film, gave her respect. Mac indicated that the reason the name was left out of the story was that it would give away her gender, thus forcing her to be nothing but female. Lauren liked the name, noting that names are terms of endearment, and Rachel even mentioned how the name Margaret could be connected to royalty. Kate indicated that a name classifies who you are and can give people perceptions about you. Aaron seemed to like the idea of a nameless narrator better, as it connected more to how she can't find her identity in the story – she is in a male world, but inside is female and has to find what her role is.

Many of the comments related to what was left out of the film. Aaron believed that it was a length issue. "The movie would drag" and there were "too many

emotions" to share from the story. Mason noticed that Laird never pinned the narrator in the film, which foreshadows his eventual place over her. As well, Kate noticed that the narrator's fears of the room where a huge part of the story that was absent from the film. Mac added that he noticed the whole "my hired man" scenario was absent from the film.

Time was also spent discussing the development of Laird. Kate felt that Laird was much more developed in the film. You could see his initial disinterest and then his eventual interest. She also believed that his motivation developed in the film was to spite his sister. Aaron agreed, noting that the two were constantly competing against each other in the film. Norman noticed that in the film, Margaret is said to be 13 years old. He remarked that this is the time where the body changes and you begin to figure out who you are. In the story, she is only 11 years old. Kate seemed to like the aging of the narrator, indicating that as a teenager, you have major identity issues, trying to find out who you are and where you belong. In general, the girls did not like Laird at all in the film. Lauren summarized their feelings best, calling him "a rat." Aaron agreed, indicating that if Laird was his brother, "pow!"

There were also a lot of comments about the changed ending. Rachel liked the ending and so did Lauren as they saw the main character as being "empowered" by her defiant words. Interestingly, Aaron disagreed, thinking the main character was far too passive at the end. Again, Kate mentioned how contradictory it was. Neil added that "something good" happened at the end of the film, with the directors "Hollywooding" it. Rachel noticed that the change was a conscious choice by the director. Lauren then added that the last words spoken by Margaret made her believe the director may have been a woman. One of the boys even mentioned how she gets up and leaves the dinner table on her own - she is not dismissed by her father. Darren believed that her final words were spoken directly to Laird. "She tells him that he can't steal her freedom." Rachel felt that her words were her way of getting back at Laird.

Overall, I was pleased with their ability to be critical about the adaptation of the short story into film format. They certainly were able to discuss the elements they saw in the film and relate them to the short story. Primarily, the film gave them a second look at the short story, helping to solidify some of their previous interpretations.

Reader's Response – Second Look Responses to "Boys and Girls"

Eight of the girls completed the assigned second look response to the short story. Following Jerry Wowk's model, the students were asked to respond once again to the idea they felt was significant and the universal implications of that idea.

Two of the girls focussed their responses on the short story alone. Anna wrote about the symbolism of the horses again, expressing some confusion about Flora, but making the guess that "Flora represented more of the girl's [freedom] and dreams [than] anything else." Alison explained her interpretation of the narrator's motivation, believing "that a lot of the reason why she acted like a boy was to rebel against her family for trying to rush her in to being someone she isn't."

Six of the girls focussed their second look responses on their evaluations of the film and whether it effectively captured the essence of the short story or aided in their understanding of the story. The ideas they focussed on as significant did not change throughout these responses as the entries were focussed more on the film than the story.

Rachel used her entire entry to discuss the significance of having the narrator nameless in the story, and named in the film. She believed that "the author chose not to name the girl in the story because she wanted the problem of gender identity to come out." Lauren also felt that this point was significant, believing that the director "did this to not classify her and it helps to show how she wants and needs to find herself."

Barbara felt that the narrator "wants to act up just like Flora does but she won't get caught is what she says." She spent the rest of her entry discussing the grinding of the horse meat, which was a predominant scene in the film and, in her mind, absent from the story. Barbara stated that the director chose the meat grinding scene "to show not think or imagine her feelings before and after."

As a summary of the central film character, Amy thought "Margaret was first out to prove that she was just as good as any boy. She didn't want to be a boy she wanted to be all that she could be even if working in the barn was considered a boys job."

Kate's entry focussed on the end of the short story and film, pointing out the contradictions that existed. She finished her entry by pointing out the fact that the film's central character sat on a truck at the end. She felt that this was significant as "a

truck is usually classified as 'guy' so by sitting in a truck she is showing that she is going to continue to break the barriers."

Lauren also noted the differences in the film and the short story centred on the dresses. She felt that by having the mother ask the narrator if she wanted a dress instead of making one for her was a significant difference. "...it gave her a choice. Its underlying meaning was, or it almost seemed it was giving her a choice on where she wanted to be and what she wanted to do. This was not effective because the audience, as well as Margaret knew that the inevitable was going to happen...she would be forced by society and the particular time period to be inside, cooking and cleaning."

The second look entries were significantly shorter, averaging about one and a half pages. Interestingly, the girls did not directly follow the format provided for them, but organized their responses on their own.

Eight of the boys completed the assigned second look response to the short story.

Three of the boys focussed their entries on a comparison of the film and the short story. Ethan felt that after reading the story and viewing the film "that the genders are somewhat in a class orientation. Where the males are further up the social 'ladder' than females." Norman felt that the "last scene where she says that they will never catch her" was not effective. He believed it took "away from the story because at the end she is only a girl and makes you use your imagination [figuring] what she will do."

Darren spent a great deal of his entry discussing the issue of the narrator's name. In the story he felt she was left nameless "because she does not have an identity. She is stuck between being a male and being a female." He felt that "if the author used the name Margaret in the story it would symbolize that she is in fact more feminine than [masculine]. That would defeat the whole purpose of the story."

Five of the boys focussed their responses on the short story. Mason discussed the symbol of Flora. "She not only symbolizes the [girl's] freedom in wanting to be who she is but the horse also symbolizes her being trapped in a world she doesn't want to be in." Aaron also discussed Flora, seeing the act of "letting the horse run out the gate as a symbol of her freedom, yet she exits the [man's] world at that point buy not understanding the nature of the choice." He also stated that "the most common theme to this story is coming of age. Eventually everything fell in to the roles that a person would expect to see in a story."

Mac focussed his entry on the significance of the foxes. He felt "that if the foxes were not in the story the father would have no use for his daughter, because she wouldn't have to go out and help him water the foxes."

Kurt summarized the universality of the story, stating that it "serves as a foundation for what society would later become: one where men and women share equal responsibilities."

Neil, who had the shortest entry, consisting of three sentences, thought "that the story is about your role in life being defined by your sex," which he stated in the first sentence was a simple reinforcement of what was said in the mixed groupings.

The second look entries were significantly shorter, averaging about one page. There were some boys who wrote closer to three pages, and some boys who wrote less than one page. Again, only one of the boys directly followed the format provided, with the others choosing to organize their responses in their own way.

"Butcher Bird" by Wallace Stegner

The second short story I chose for the project, was, in my mind, a piece that was very different from "Boys and Girls." Male characters and situations dominated this particular story, and I felt it was a great companion piece for my research.

Instead of having the students read the story on their own, I began an oral reading of the short story. I asked for two male and two female volunteers to also read sections of the short story orally. With about half of the story remaining, I allowed the students to read the story on their own and then draft their first look response.

Reader's Response – Initial Responses to "Butcher Bird"

Ten of the girls worked on first look responses to the short story "Butcher Bird" by Wallace Stegner. An interesting initial observation is that seven of the girls' entries did not follow Jerry Wowk's three part response model as was required and the remaining three were written using the response model.

The seven girls who did not follow the response model did have some interesting ideas to share, although their responses were somewhat less organized, focussing more on the element of symbolism and general detail recall with very little personal experience shared.

Amy saw the boy in the story as a "typical young boy who likes shooting animals and doing things with his father." She saw the mother as a "stereotypical female. She stays in the house and doesn't get involved with the outdoor work except when shooting the bird." Amy also saw some significance in the death of the animal. She thinks that "when the boy kills the animal its not just the dying of the animal but the dying of the friendship between himself and Mr. Garfield."

Lauren began her response by looking specifically at Mr. Garfield. She "noticed some of the symbolism in the short story. Mr. Garfield was a nice kind man maybe like the cat Garfield." She continues her discussion of the symbolism in the story by noting that "there was symbolism in the sparrow when the boys father shot him. He did it to spite the mother and the neighbour, Mr. Garfield. The boys father might resent Mr. Garfield because he has things that he does not, such as the [gramophone], rug on the floor and the ability and money to give his son a gun." She also comments on the presence of the internal conflict for the father who "feels there is more important things to worry about than trees, [gramophones] and rugs." She also indicates that she feels "sorry for the dad he has to do all of these different things to feed his family. It was sometime around the 1930's so he is in his traditional role as the man as a provider."

Alison opened her response by stating that she "really didn't like the father in this story. I thought it was awful of him to kill the bird after his son asked him not to." She wrote later in her entry of the significance of the sparrow, thinking "that when the father kills the sparrow it is a sign that his relationship with his family is also dying."

Ellen's entry showed her struggles with her first read of the short story. She described how she went on the internet to discover the significance of the name Lucifer, but once she had, she was unable to see a connection. She stated in her response that she "honestly feels that the boys would find it easier to relate to than the girls."

Anna, whose entry was incomplete, also noted the symbolism of the sparrow, seeing it as "the death of happiness that the father has destroyed." She also stated that "The author placed their house with no trees represents their unhappiness and the neighbours with the trees is almost like the wifes fantisy."

Lisa discussed both the setting and the conflict in the opening paragraph of her response. She noted that "they lived in a desert which nothing could grow in." She felt that the man versus himself conflict was especially clear "because the father has

inner conflict. It was because he was concerned about the drought and his wife and Mr. Garfield talked about trees." She concluded her response by stating that she "could not relate to anyone in this story."

For Nan, the only thing that seemed to strike her was the shooting of the sparrow as well. She thought that "the shooting was in contrast with the fight. When the fight got at it's climax he shot the bird." She shared a short personal anecdote about how much she hates it when people " are doing things that I should be and people I trust take their side."

The three girls who did follow Jerry's response model identified symbolic elements as the keys to the significant ideas being presented in the story. Barbara felt that "the way the sparrow was a symbolism of the fathers hate for his [neighbours] and how he doesn't care about h is wife. The barren land symbolized how his world was not supposed to be colourful. This was the dull life he lived. Its like he didn't care about anything. Anything he had to do with fun he killed it just like his family. In the story the fathers the butcher bird he preys on the innocent just like the butcher bird."

Rachel felt that the idea the author "is trying to say is jealousy can be an ugly emotion. The father is a prime example when he kills the sparrow to spite Mr. Garfield."

For Kate, the sparrow "symbolizes innocence and the hawk is…a symbol of death. So he may be [referring] to the death of innocence." She noted that the father and son were not close to each other and the father and mother seemed to have separate interests. She "felt that the father and Mr. Garfield were character foils. Mr. Garfield was optimistic and caring whereas the father was stern."

The second part of the response, asking for a personal connection, was very short for all three girls. Kate had difficulty finding something to write about. "This story did not, at all, relate to me, in anyway. I mean the closest thing that related to me is that my father is a farmer always concerned with the financial aspect of our families well-being. He is usually quite stern." Barbara's personal response section was very emotional. She "thought it was very sad…it really bugged me" and said so repeatedly. Only Rachel felt a clear personal connection to the story. She felt she could "identify with the little boy. I know how when boys are young they feel the need to discover and along comes the killing to. My brother and I one year there was lots of [caterpillars], plucked them off their leaves. When then made a sandwich, one leaf on top of it and one over." She then described how her brother then took a

"[hammer] and [proceeded] to pound the [caterpillar] into the stump."

The third section of the response asks for a universal application of the short story. Interestingly, Rachel never clearly stated what she believes makes the story universal, but implied that "upsetting the balance of life" is something that people do. Barbara closed her response by stating that "This story has no happiness to people its sad." Kate again expressed her inability to write about the story stating that she did "not know how to speak about this short story in a universal way because I can not see it relating to very many people. The point of view allows us to pick the side we wish to so, I mean, you can not connect to anyone specific. This makes this short story less effective to me."

On average, the girls' responses were approximately two to two and a half double spaced pages in length.

Eight of the boys completed the first look response to the short story. Just as with the girls, not all the boys followed the outlined response format. Four of the boys wrote using Jerry's three part response structure, and four of the boys wrote applying their own structure to the response. The boys' responses that did not follow the outlined format were less organized, but still contained some interesting first ideas about the significance of the short story.

Ethan felt that "The setting of the story added a lot to the relationship between the wife and husband. She wanted the expensive things that the [Garfield's] had in their house. The father was angered by the fact that he was trying to grow a crop that would sell and make money and he was low on money and Mr. Garfield was growing a nonsensical crop of trees and he had lots of [fancy] gadgets and [possessions]."

As well, Aaron felt that "the most significant part of the story is when the woman begins to want more material possessions…I can see a father getting angry if someone came in and started showing his family all the thing he could not provide for his family. That would kind of make a father feel like he is not [fulfilling] his role." He also saw "the mother as being kind of a nag. If she wanted willows she should have got them herself."

Similar to Aaron, Mason focussed on the idea of jealousy and the father's ability to provide for his family. "Instead of the mans wife looking up and talking about him she goes on about Mr. Garfield. I think that he feels that he isn't providing for his family the way he should be. His wife keeps nagging him…I really don't think that the wife is being fair to her husband…she knows that he works hard to keep food

on the table but she still wants the willow trees which would just make more work."

Darren too felt that the short story was "based on jealousy. The father in the story is jealous of Mr. Garfield. His wife things that Mr. Garfield is a better husband than him…Because his wife is [fascinated] by Mr. Garfield, I think the father hates him for it."

Mac shared how he felt that the father "shot the sparrow to piss off Mr. Garfield, because he couldn't go out and shoot anything, because he couldn't do that kinda stuff."

The four boys who used Jerry's response format had many different significant or striking ideas in the first section of their responses. Norman felt that the "contrast between a poor farmer and a rich [British] immigrant" was important. So was the sparrow, which represented "all the hatred that Harry has for Mr. Garfield. It also may represent the father's taking of the boys innocence."

Kurt felt that "At a first glance, "Butcher Bird"…offers the idea that wives should have their say in what the family does, and should be able to pursue their own interests. What is significant is that the wife has her own ideas and the husband shuts them down. This is a sign of the times where the wife had to abide by what the husband said."

In a very short response, Neil stated that he "really didn't see the point of the story. I didn't get it. At the end of the story I think the mother was comparing the father to the butcher bird." This comment concluded the first section of Neil's response.

For part two of the response, which asks the students to share personal experiences that connect to the literature, two of the boys, Norman and Neil expressed that they could in no way share a personal connection to this short story. Norman summarizes the feelings of both boys when he stated that he has "never really been in any situation like that."

Kurt wrote that he was reminded of parents and their reaction to music. He described the situation where "your parents think that the music you listen to is stupid. What makes me think of this is when the father thinks that planting trees in a drought would be stupid."

Darren described why he believes the story centres on the notion of jealousy. He believes it is "because I do this when I feel jealous. I mock people or make fun of the people that I am jealous of. However I am not jealous very often." He went on to

describe how a specific friend of his calls another boy "names and picks out his bad qualities. The same as in the story with the father and Mr. Garfield."

Norman and Neil again had difficulty formulating their ideas in the final part of the response, which asks for a universal connection. Neil simply stated "I don't get what the author is saying about the human condition."

Darren judged the actions of the father and the mother. "I don't think that what the father does is right, with the jealousy and all. However what the mother did was not right either. She should not have compared him to Mr. Garfield as much as she did. I think she should learn to appreciate what she has."

Kurt felt that the universal aspect of the story was no longer relevant to today. "This story would have had relevance in its time, but that relevance does not stand today. As I mentioned before, men and women can both make their own decisions now, so the universal appeal is not there. It did make a lot of males hope that the wife would be shot by the father, so there is some universality for males."

On average, the boys' responses were somewhat shorter at about two double spaced pages in length. Two were noticeably short, only containing a handful of sentences.

"Butcher Bird" – Discussion of the Short Story

The following day, after some other preliminary activities, I asked the students to gather again in their same sex groupings and assigned them two literary terms, which would be the focus for their analysis of the short story. They worked for the rest of the class and again for 15 minutes the following day. I did not ask the students to gather together into mixed groupings primarily because a large number of students were absent on a field trip the day before. I wanted the students to have time in smaller groups to catch up on the discussions and be prepared for the round table. I was concerned the students who were absent would lose their focus in a larger group situation.

Norman opened the discussion by sharing his interpretation of the setting for the story. In his opinion, the story took place in the 1930's in the United States. He also spent some time quickly clarifying that the reference to Saskatchewan was in there "just as a comment about "up there where we live in igloos" and did not actually refer to the actual place of the story. Aaron continued the discussion of setting by

discussion the mood of jealousy that dominated the short story. He felt that the father was so jealous of Mr. Garfield, especially when Mr. Garfield handed the boy the rifle. In Aaron's mind, the father was jealous because "he couldn't provide for his own son." He added that he felt that the story took place in the Midwest, probably somewhere close to Minnesota.

Lauren jumped in to the discussion at this point, sharing that the father may not actually be jealous as he felt that "Mr. Garfield was stupid…he focussed on material things." Mason joined the discussion pointing out that the father's focus on the possessions that Mr. Garfield has proves that he is jealous because he can't provide.

Interestingly, as the conversation continued, the boys dominated the discussion for the first half of the sixty minutes provided. They made 22 comments while the girls only shared 15. The boys focussed on the literary elements they were assigned and did not stray from them unless they were defending their ideas challenged by one of the girls. The girls, for the first half of the discussion, shared more of their reactions to the boys' interpretations than actual ideas of their own.

For example, Neil continued the conversation by sharing how it was ironic that the boy had a pet weasel that he planned on skinning later. Norman added that he felt the boy "didn't love it enough." Mason jumped in, sharing that people do raise cows simply for slaughter. Lauren then joined the discussion by saying that those people who raise cows "don't name them." Mason disagreed, saying that in "4-H you name it, raise it and sell it" knowing exactly what is going to happen once you sell it.

Sam shared his reaction to the name of Lucifer. He felt that it was ironic. Neil said it was "creepy but not ironic." One boy felt there was more to the Lucifer name than the others gave credit to. He pointed out that Lucifer was the "fallen angel" and like Lucifer is loved, but will die or fall from grace later. No one in the class commented on these ideas as Norman changed the subject.

Norman felt that the irony in the story centred on the reader's surprise that the father was not shot by his son. Mr. Garfield gave the son a gun to kill evil, so it would not have been a surprise if the son had killed his father. Lauren agreed, stating that she "thought he was going to." Kate added to the discussion of irony, believing that it was "ironic that the gun wasn't used for its purpose." Mason felt that by killing the sparrow, the father was mocking everything that Mr. Garfield stood for. Will shared that he felt the "shooting of the sparrow and the father don't match." Lauren felt that everything at the end of the story seemed fine, although Rachel felt that the mother's

final words were full of sarcasm. It was at that point that Lauren was worried that the mother "was going to snap." All of the guys at that point chorused "she does!" Aaron then finished this section of the discussion by pointing out the double meaning of the word 'butcher.' He indicated that the meaning was obvious, referring to the meat butcher.

As the students continued to get further into the story, the whole notion of Lucifer arose again. Rachel shared that Lucifer kills his followers, and Aaron shared his frustration with this topic by stating "I don't get it." Lisa pointed the students back to the story, stating that the story said that "weasels kill for fun." Norman felt that the weasel was a sacrifice. It is evil and "kills for no reason." With a rhetorical question, Mac queried, "What is the purpose of the weasel?" He felt it was to show that the son is just as bad as the father. Sam then jumped in again, sharing that Lucifer was damned to eternal death, which means that the weasel was sure to die.

The conversation shifted again, back to the ending of the story. Lauren felt sure that the father would "turn the gun on the mother." Kate agreed, saying that the mother's nagging certainly contributed to the mood of the story. Lauren felt that the mother and father should get a divorce as many of her words to close the story seemed to be spoken out of spite. Mac couldn't help but agree with Kate's observation of the nagging wife. He used an analogy of a wife who nags constantly for 25 years – that would surely justify killing the wife. He even goes on to say that "maybe he shot the bird to shut up the wife."

Barbara shared that she felt the butcher bird symbolized the father. The sparrow symbolized Mr. Garfield. By killing the sparrow the father got "to tear Mr. Garfield apart." Kate felt that the two men where character foils. The father "cares for his family" and Mr. Garfield likes "fancy and nice things."

Nan shared that she felt the man vs. man conflict centred on the mother and father. The "wife insists on the visit and planing trees." The environmental conflict would be "the father vs. the sparrow and the father vs. the drought. She felt that there was a lot of "pessimism" in the short story.

It was at this half way point that I directly intervened. It is hard to explain, but the students seemed to be hiding specific emotions, which created a great deal of tension as they tried to discuss this story starting from the literary terms. Their interpretations seemed to be there, but in a list form and they didn't seem to want to take any risks. Many of them were making faces showing disdain, disgust or

confusion. There were many sidebar conversations during the round table discussion, which was unusual as they were well versed in the specific expectations set out for this activity. I specifically intervened at this point and asked the students to just open up the responses to look at the short story from an ideas or issues standpoint and leave the analysis of literary technique to the side for awhile.

Interestingly, it was at this point that the conversation picked up momentum. Both the boys and the girls shared their ideas in a somewhat equal sense – more equal than they have throughout the project. The girls shared 22 comments and the boys shared 23. Three boys dominated the overall discussion of this short story, Mac, Mason and Aaron, whereas more girls shared their ideas throughout the discussion.

As the restriction of the literary terms was lifted, the girls seemed to join the discussion more freely. Kate opened the discussion after my interruption by stating that the father "should be angry" but should that be a reason for the father to shoot the mother? "Girls nag" she stated to the class. Mac replied that "the husband should have pointed the gun" at the mother and said "go live with Mr. Garfield." Rachel seemed disgusted by the mother's attitude, noting that it "made me puke." She was particularly offended by the fact that the mother "sucked up to him when he was cleaning the gun." Aaron felt that the mother was "nagging him to provide more than he could." Amy stated that the mother "just simply wanted willows." Rachel felt that the willows were a symbol of change as they would help them with the dust and drought conditions. Mac replied that "money is time" so if the mother wanted them, why didn't she just go out and get them without all the nagging. Mason agreed, noting that she should have just asked and not compared the father to Mr. Garfield. After the father said no, she didn't quit. Mason also believed that "she wouldn't maintain the trees" once she got them, the father would have to.

After a slight pause, Ellen commented that nagging is the "only way to get through to a guy." There was no reply to this comment, as loaded as it appeared to be. Neil made the comment following Ellen that the mother "was to be in the house" as was the custom for the time period. Rachel tried to bring back the notion of the willows representing change, stating that the father doesn't want the willows because he doesn't want change. Nan felt that the father didn't want the willows because he didn't want to be like Mr. Garfield. Alison agreed, stating that the father didn't want what Mr. Garfield had. Aaron and Mac reinforced how silly the whole willow notion was by pointing out that there "was no water" and that there would be no purpose for

the tree – not like an apple tree. Jokingly, Mason shared that perhaps the willows could be used to build the mother a deck. Mac then stated that he felt the tree was a bridge the father wanted to break.

The conversation then shifted to Mr. Garfield. Rachel described him as sophisticated and educated, which was a direct contradiction of the uneducated simply farmer. She noted that the father's dialogue showed how he "is not proper." Aaron pointed out that Mr. Garfield was from England and felt that he was rubbing his manners and good breeding in the father's face. Neil disagreed, feeling that Mr. Garfield simply wanted "to be a good host." Nan felt that the father was "making fun of Mr. Garfield." Kate felt that it was not Mr. Garfield who was rubbing his education and good manners in the father's face, it was the mother who was doing so. Rachel added to this stating that the father "feels like Mr. Garfield is rubbing" it in his face.

Neil believed that the "father seemed more practical." Aaron believed that "Mr. Garfield would leave if the trees don't grow" because that would mean a loss of money and a loss of material wealth. He felt he was "a moron for going to the desert." Mac felt that Mr. Garfield shared his trees with the father and his family to show that he was more knowledgeable. Rachel asked the class which character they felt more for, but got no direct reply to her question.

Rachel also noted that the father judges Mr. Garfield "because of the ice in the lemonade." Aaron felt that the father "had to put his anger into something." Nan agreed with Rachel, noting that the father seemed to be "consciously looking for things to hate." She tried to contextualize the father's motivation by stating that "everyone here has disliked someone for having more." Mason felt that the father expresses his feelings "to show that he is superior." The butcher bird "kills and mounts its kill…shows other animals it can kill at any time." Rachel added to Mason's ideas, stating that this action symbolizes the father's revenge against Mr. Garfield. Aaron saw it as "putting his foot down." Sam noted that the death of the sparrow could potential kill the "relationship between the father and the mother."

Aaron asked the class where the mother could go if she left the father. Nan felt that she "needs a husband" whereas Rachel felt that "she could live with family." Both Mac and Aaron called out "what about money?"

There was another pause as one of the students asked how much time was left in class. As their focus resumed, the girls took over the direction of the discussion, going back to the literary terms they had been asked to look at first. Kate wanted to

share her ideas relating to the man vs. himself conflict. She felt that the father was "concerned about surviving the drought" while the mother seemed "more worried about material things."

Nan and Kate then shared their ideas relating to the point of view. The story had an omniscient narrator. They felt that a first person narrator through the father would "allow the reader to understand the father's anger" and perhaps the reader would feel more anger towards the mother. If the story was told in first person through the mother, the girls felt the reader "would understand her better." If the story was told in first person through the son, the reader would get to know his feelings and "maybe his reactions to his parents." Rachel jumped in at this point and indicated that the boy would make an unreliable narrator. Nan replied that "everyone sided with the narrator in "Boys and Girls" because of the point of view."

The two boys then made three final comments. Aaron saw the father as "a symbol of power." Mac noted that the mother would "stay in her role." Aaron agreed with Mac stating that the mother had a choice to "leave now or go back in your place." As the bell rang, Rachel reiterated how much sarcasm seemed to be present in the dialogue.

Reader's Response – Second Look Responses to "Butcher Bird"

Six of the boys completed the second look response for the short story "Butcher Bird". All of the boys chose to complete the second look responses following their own format, abandoning Jerry's format which asked them to again reflect on a significant or striking idea and again look at the universality of the story.

Aaron indicated in his lengthy second look response that he felt it was "a very good idea to keep the boy almost as a neutral character. He is innocent and doesn't quite know what his family members are feeling." According to Aaron, "the most significant part of the text was when the mother wanted some trees…At that point she is an opposing force to the father…The mother takes her stand and says she doesn't mind Mr. Garfield." He also felt that the drought conditions described in the story were also important. "The father was having a hard enough time providing food for his family and his wife wanted willow trees." Overall, Aaron felt that "the [author's] choice to have the father react in the way he did was a good one. In what other way would the man react under the conditions he was in."

Mac's response contained a string of significant details. Thinking of the 1930s as the possible setting, he felt "the author used that time period to show the difficult time period and the families trouble with the next door neighbour." He then turned to the weasel, stating that "the author used the weasel to show the power of the boy. The name of the weasel also fits because Lucifer was sent to eternal death. That fits the weasel because he will eventually be killed and skinned." To conclude his one double spaced page response Mac indicated that he thought "the father shot the sparrow to shut his wife up and make Mr. Garfield feel bad, and maybe to show him that we was more weak than him."

Mason's response focussed on two symbols, the trees and the sparrow. "I feel that the trees are very important in this story. The father doesn't like Mr. Garfield one bit and this is why he doesn't let his wife plant them. If he were to plant the trees this would show us that he may secretly want to be friends with the Garfields." Mason also wrote about the sparrow, which he felt was connected to the trees. "When the father shot the sparrow he showed us how much re really does hate Mr. Garfield. The shooting of the sparrow also represents the death of his relationship with his wife. The father's wife didn't want him to shoot the bird, but he did anyway."

Norman also focussed his response on the trees, which he felt symbolized freedom. "They symbolize this far two people in this story. It does this for Mr. Garfield. By having trees it sets him apart from everyone else who lives there. By having them it gives him something to live for…The other one is the mother. At the beggining she is happy with her baron surroundings never questioning her husband at all. She visits Mr. Garfield and sees his trees giving her a glimmer of hope. This is going to allow her to claw her way back to the surface. Once again they will set her apart from everyone else."

Neil's second look was as short as his first look response. He indicated that the large group discussion did provide him with some understanding, however "the theme of the story didn't come out but the motivation for the father became more apparent. He took out his frustration on the sparrow."

Kurt also focussed on the death of the sparrow at the end of the story. He felt "it was symbolic because it showed how the father thinks that he is superior to Mr. Garfield, and by shooting the sparrow, he kills any relationship that the two might have had. Also, he kills the relationship between himself and his wife when he does this because he shoots the door to her freedom." As did many of the other boys, Kurt

continued his response with his perceptions of the symbolism of the trees. "The trees are symbolic because they could be a gateway to a friendship with Mr. Garfield, but the father wishes not to have that sort of relationship with him, so he neglects it. He thinks that if he gets trees put in his yard, it will seem like his wife has taken control of him and be less of a man."

The boys' entries were quite short, averaging one double spaced page in length. The exception were Aaron and Neil's responses, which were four sentences and over three and a half double-spaced pages in length respectively.

Eight of the girls completed the assigned second look response. Seven of the eight responses did not follow Jerry's response format, but used an individual organizational method.

Lisa's response indicated that she did not fully understand the story, even after the group work and round table discussion had occurred. "I did not enjoy this short story because I did not fully understand it…I do not understand why the [boy's] father does not get along with Mr. Garfield and why he is so angry…why would the author have chosen Mr. Garfield planting trees…like that has no specific reason or at least I do not think so."

Kate noted that there "were plenty of things I did not really see when we first looked at the short story. I did not see the conflict between the father and the environment; the drought." She also shared how she felt that the father killed the sparrow more because he was angry at his wife and not because he was "out to spite Mr. Garfield." She concluded her response by noting the significance of the weasel Lucifer. "Lucifer is the name of the devil who is evil and the boy plans to kill the [weasels] and everything else that is evil."

Rachel's response focussed on her awareness of irony. She noted that "the father uses sarcasm constantly. One of the most ironic moments that stands out is the gun was given to prevent senseless killings, yet it was used to senselessly kill the sparrow." She concluded her response by looking at the mother's motivation. "The mother in the story is not trying to provoke the father but rather she is trying to quell some of her sadness."

Ellen too felt that the name of the weasel was a striking detail, noting that it was "the one thing that clearly sticks in my mind…I believe when the boys skins him, he'll be taking out his aggression of what he has seen through his father, mother relationship and his different relationship with his parents." She concluded her

response by writing that she "honestly thought that the father was going to shoot the mother."

Lauren, who actually drafted more of a first look formatted response than a second look response, focussed on the boy and his weasel as well. She felt that "The boy named the weasel Lucifer which was also associated with Satan or the devil. Lucifer was damned to eternal death just as the weasel was in the story. The author made the conscience choice to make that connotation between the two…the weasel killed for fun, for the power of killing." She also noted, towards the end of her response about the "many other choices the author made in the story, such as the symbol of a willow tree. A willow tree droops but is very pretty, nice a big. This may symbolize that the Garfields are more nice, kind, soft people. A willow stem is light and soft."

Amy distinguished a difference between the boys' and the girls' interpretations of the mother, noting that "the boys think she's a nagger I think she is asking" for the willow trees. She too noted the presence of irony when "Mr. Garfield tells the boy to shoot only the bad animals that kill for no reason such as the butcher bird. The boy seems like a butcher bird to me. He kills animals for no reason at all and enjoys it." She concluded her response by explaining that "the father is jealous of Mr. Garfield…He can't afford [the trees] and doesn't have any money. He is jealous of the fact that his wife likes Mr. [Garfield's] yard better than his."

Barbara, the only girl who followed Jerry's format for a second look response, noted in the opening section that "the idea of killing a sparrow was what struck me how the father killed out of frustration and nothing else to disobey Mr. Garfield." She also commented on how "the sparrow was the innocent boy type figure or Mr. Garfield and the father was the butcher bird." She explained how she thought it was funny how the mother is the one who seems misused, not the gun, and how awful it was that the sparrow had to die while the butcher bird lived. When confronted with the second part of the response, asking for a universal connection, Barbara offers "the idea of how people can be [reckless] killers of dreams."

The girls' second look responses were about the same length as their first look responses, averaging about two double spaced pages.

Reflections on the Literature Discussion

Through the metacognitive journals the students have provided many interesting comments related to the stories and activities. I knew that their reflections on "Butcher Bird" would be no exception, especially since there were a large number of students who had a strong reaction to certain aspects of the story seen both in their responses and in the class discussion.

Only three of the boys made specific comments relating to the short story "Butcher Bird" in their learning journals. Mason, Mac and Kurt all shared their perceptions of how their group worked on the analysis of the story. Mason noted that "It was difficult to get started because we were getting some pretty lame ideas for setting." Mac admitted that they "did analyze the story in your same sex groups but our group didn't really do a whole lot." He then confessed that they "tried to listen to what Norman, Will and Neil had to say because they too were doing setting. At one point Kurt went over and tried to steal one of their note books, but it didn't work." Kurt noted that his "group usually works well together and there was nothing different about it this time. If you work with people that have similar interests, the whole procedure is quicker and easier."

In his entry written prior to the class discussion, Mason had some strong feelings to share about the father and the mother in the story. First looking at the mother, Mason noted that "His wife [definitely], rubbed in the fact that Mr. Garfield was better off than he was. I have a reel problem with this. She had no right nagging him like that. He is trying to provide for his family and he is working his butt off to do it yet she wants him to take care of some trees that wouldn't even grow."

Kurt also shared some of his feelings about the story prior to the class discussion. He admitted that "The short story, "Butcher Bird," had some appeal to me, but it was quite monotonous. The only real point where the story gets interesting is the scene at the end where the father is suggested to have the same qualities of the butcher bird as he shoots a sparrow. The fact that almost every male wanted the wife to be shot shows where men's heads usually are: focused on violence. What I disliked about the story was the amount of time wasted on saying nothing. Like, "Boys and Girls", "Butcher Bird" could have been shortened down quite a bit and still would have said the same thing." Kurt also shared that he "did not like the father's attitude in the story because he seems to think that his word is god." He closed this response

by stating that he fails "to see a real theme to this story, but I assume that I will find one once we rip it apart."

After the discussion, Mason seemed to feel the need to clarify his views on the place of males and females in the family. He noted that I was "probably thinking that I have some sort of problem with women from journal entries and in class discussions but I don't. Its just that these days some women are not as loyal as they used to be and sometimes some women can't understand how hard men work to support a family."

Mac focussed specifically on the moment of tension that occurred where I intervened in the discussion. "The one thing I noticed today was that it seemed every one was pissed off. I don't know why either." He then made comments about Norman's controversial comments relating to the father and son. "I still don't understand how Norman could say that the son could of shot his father because he shot one sparrow. Then if the boy would have shot his dad he would be just like his dad, just shooting one innocent mammal." He seemed to express some regret at how the students had treated Norman during this discussion as he "couldn't believe how we just ripped apart Norman."

All ten of the girls made specific comments in their metacognitive journals. Some girls even made comments in more than one entry. The girls expressed how their groups worked as well as what they thought of the discussion and felt about the actual short story.

Eight of the girls wrote about their group work prior to the round table discussion of the short story. Anna shared that "the discussion didn't go that well today. My group was a little [too mellow] and it almost seemed like they were in a fight or something." Interestingly, one of Anna's group members, Alison, felt that her group worked well together in the second group discussion session. She "found some things that were quite useful. I think our group of me, Anna and Ellen work well together. I think that we do because they aren't the people I tend to talk to the most." Ellen noted that when she "was working in our small groups, I found more was understood than there was" on the previous day.

Nan admitted that her and her partner Kate "didn't get much done because it is about to be May long and it is hard to hold it in." She did qualify her comment saying that her "and Kate do work well together. Most of the time." Kate echoed Nan's feelings about their work together, admitting that they "did laugh alot…[but] got our work finished." Once Kate and Nan's partners, Lauren and Lisa, returned the next

day, Kate still seemed frustrated with her group's work efforts. "Our group worked really awful today. I mean Lauren and Lisa were talking (like in sixth grade) about these cute guys and which one should call then and…so on …you get it. I was sorta disappointed." With a hint of sarcasm she did say that she "should stop nagging because according to Mac that is all us women do and I would hate to fit the stereotype."

Amy also expressed that "Barbara and I worked well together. We had to go back and read a little to find some ideas but after that we came up with a lot of ideas."

Prior to the discussion, three girls shared their emotional responses to the short story. Barbara "was kinda blocked by the fact I was so [aggravated] on how the father treated his wife and I couldn't think of anything like symbolism." Lisa wrote that she "did not really like the story because nothing really exciting happened, or else I did relate to it."

The most interesting comments came from Amy who indicated that "All the literature we have been analyzing is about [families] with very stereotypical families. Maybe if we read literature about females doing more and more new things males could recognize their achievements." She also wrote that "[today's] men who share the responsibilities of house cleaning and raising children aren't so [chauvinistic]."

Barbara, in her reflections on the round table discussion of the story, simply stated that she "enjoyed what I caught of the discussion." She also "really enjoyed analyzing this story for the fact I didn't understand the whole story." As well, Nan's comments were concise, indicating how she likes "when we have these class discussions. I love the round circle. It really makes ripping pieces of literature up in to little pieces easy."

Both Ellen and Kate commented on the tension created in the room as the discussion became somewhat heated. Ellen noted that "when we got off track in our larger group it seemed that we were all frustrated. I didn't notice when people were talking to each other sort of rudely. I think that has something to do with the attitude I was in. I really didn't catch myself saying anything as if I was mad or angry." As Mac expressed, Kate was somewhat shocked at how the class seemed to jump on Norman and his ideas. "I can not believe how awful everyone, including myself was to Norman. All of the anger from the story came out of us and we took a majority of it out on Norman." She then apologized for snapping at me as I attempted to intervene on Norman's behalf in the discussion. "I just knew you were referring to me and I

knew that you were right and that even if I did not like the short story I should still get the important things out. Sorry."

Lauren also showed some sympathy for Norman. "Poor Norman, did he ever get picked on! I do understand where he was coming from. Yes the neighbour, Mr. Garfield did say only to shoot things that kill for fun and no reason but never once did think that the boys was then going to turn around and shoot his father. There was absolutely no motivation for it." She too noted that "Everything was really very tense and the father was speaking to the mother with his eye looking out over the gun ready to shoot the mother. But again there was really no motivation for that either, just that they were arguing."

Rachel "really enjoyed today's conversation. It became very heated after the two teachers left." This comment was referring to the fact that Norman and Lauren, two strong class discussion leaders, had to leave early for a field trip. She went on to express that she "wasn't too happy with what Mason said. He told me at the last discussion the mother would go out and have an affair with Mr. Garfield." Rachel disagreed with Mason, primarily because she sympathized with her. "All she wants is a little reminder of where she came from. I see the mother as homesick and becomes more so when she talks with a civilized Mr. Garfield. She has a husband that is cold and unsympathetic to his wife's needs. The father is very sarcastic and cruel." She then had an interesting interpretation of why the father is so against the planting of willow trees. "I think he is afraid of what it symbolizes. The willow tree symbolizes change and even more remotely Mr. Garfield. The father seems to be a guy set in his ways and change would upset his ways."

The discussion seemed to create a very strong reaction in Amy. Her metacognitive response contains specific emotionally charged reactions to many of the ideas shared in the round table. She started by saying how she hates:

> "how guys are always complaining about girls especially when they are lazier than women. In the story the mother wanted willows so she always talked about Mr. Garfields. The boys in the class complained that all she did was nag at her poor husband well I disagree. She had to stay in the house and cook and clean all day maybe all she wanted was some nice trees in the yard her husband couldn't even grow grass nevermind a tree. Some guys said if she wants a tree she should go grow one, well is she supposed to take on both roles now.

> Clean, cook, raise the children and work outdoors. [What's] her husband doing all day. I didn't feel this strongly towards the story when I first read it but after the boys in our class brought up their opinions I've really started to get mad. I'm so tired of all the gender stereotyping boys in our class [that's] all they do is complain about women. I bet they would starve without women because they are to lazy to get up and cook for themselves. Maybe they should step back and look at how hard women work. We don't complain about them nearly as much as they complain about us.

Both Amy and Kate shared some additional personal reactions to the short story in yet another entry, which was written the day after the discussion had taken place in class. Kate said that she "did not [incredibly] enjoy the short story 'Butcher Bird.' I can not really tell you why. I had no interest in the story at all. I mean what was the point of the short story. I understand that by killing the sparrow the father kills the anger inside of him. Or at least I think that is what he is doing. Maybe if I had a better understanding of the short story and I could relate to some of the issues in the short story I would have enjoyed it more."

Amy focused her comments on the sparrow. She felt "sad that the little bird died its a living creature. Some of the students said who cares its just a bird. I CARE. Its not just a bird it was a living creature." She also wrote about the mother's reaction to the death of the sparrow. "I think that the mother is seeing what I see, a helpless innocent creature that God put on the earth and it is killed for no reason by a heartless human."

Written and Oral Presentation Assignments

Following the formal study of the short stories in round table format, the students were given two extension assignments. One was a written assignment, which invited them to select a character from one of the short stories and write a creative personal response from that point of view. This particular assignment was one very similar to one that Gabriel (1990) used in her first quarter freshman composition class to determine the correlation between gender, reading and writing.

The other assignment was a group oral presentation of a scene from one of the short stories that they adapted. This idea was developed after reading Kazemek's

(1995) ideas on reader's theatre. According to Kazemek (1995), reader's theatre interpretations of texts and other oral performances encourage students to study and think about texts very closely. It is through the discussion and rehearsals of scenes where they have to spend time exploring who the characters are, why they act the way they do and how they can best represent them. This focus on character and character motivation was something I certainly wanted to explore. There was only one specific criteria the group had to keep in mind as they choose the scene – the large mixed groups had to select a scene so that at least one same sex group would be presenting characters of a gender opposite to their own. The students completed the written assignment individually and completed the oral presentation assignment in the same sex groups they had formed during the project.

For the written assignment, the students were given the following instructions on the blackboard:

> *You must create a personal journal entry from the point of view of one of the characters from the short story "Boys and Girls' or "Butcher Bird."*
>
> *The entry requires you to create a persona, which means the assignment will be drafted in first person.*
>
> *The purpose of the assignment is to demonstrate your chosen character's motivation. Your writing needs to be grounded in the story you choose.*

As a class, we discussed the format of a journal, and shared our notions of the reflective qualities that are found in that type of writing. I reminded them to be careful and selective of the language they chose to use as language will help to define their persona. Questions was posed about motivation and I reminded students to look carefully at the characters' actions, reactions, thoughts and feelings to help them determine persona. I told them that they could make some assumptions relating to the characters as they wrote, but the assumptions must be ones that the text would reasonably support. They needed to rely on the information that was shared in the round table discussion of the short story and the ideas supplied by their peers. As well,

they could weave quotations from the short stories to help them add validity to the ideas they shared. As Pace and Townsend (1999) noticed with their own classrooms "what we talk about when we talk about characters shapes how students understand both themselves and others" (p. 49) and I felt this assignment would allow for some insight of that nature to occur.

The students were given 45 minutes of class time to create a first draft response. All of the students settled into the task quite quickly. Each student had quickly selected a character and began some planning and drafting of their ideas. For this activity, I was far more interested in the choices the students would make and their reflections on those choices rather than the actual product they would create.

As I walked around the room, I informally surveyed the students to see how they were tackling the assignment. All of the boys selected characters from the short story "Butcher Bird." Only one of the boys selected a female persona, writing from the point of view of the mother. I asked this student why he chose to write from a female persona and he told me that he felt he was up for a challenge. He said the mother's motivation was fairly clear, but that getting into the female character's skin would be the toughest part. Ethan chose to write from the point of view of the sparrow.

Only one student, Nan, was absent the day this was assigned. Looking at the rest of the girls, three of them selected characters from "Butcher Bird." Lauren selected the father, Rachel selected Mr. Garfield and Barbara selected the mother. The remaining six girls selected female characters from "Boys and Girls."

Following the 45 minutes of drafting time, I asked the students to complete their drafts at home and turn their attention now to the oral presentation assignment. I put character groupings from each short story on the blackboard to help the group select scenes to adapt into a role-play. I then asked the large, mixed sex groupings to brainstorm ideas for the character groupings. I felt this would create discussion around all of the choices, allowing students to do some pre-thinking and planning before they selected their scene and characters. The remainder of the class was given to the students to then make their scene selection in the larger groups and work in their smaller, same sex groupings to adapt the scene into a role-play.

The following day, the students presented their adapted scenes. I asked the students to view the oral presentations and jot down what they saw in relation to character portrayal. The mixed sex groupings performed their scenes back to back –

the girls presenting first and the boys presenting second.

Following the presentations, the students, reflecting in their research journals, had many mixed comments about the role-plays. Overall, Ellen felt that "the [boys'] acting seemed to be much more blunt then how the girls acted. There was more expression with the girls" then she saw with the boys.

Rachel felt that Will had played the girl from "Boys and Girls" in a more guyish manner." As well, Will's portrayal of the narrator in the scene with her grandmother was far too natural, according to Barbara. She felt that Kate had done a better job of portraying how unnatural it was for the narrator to sit properly. However, Amy felt that Kate's portrayal of the narrator was "like a boy when she was supposed to be a girl…interpreted her as a boy trapped in a [girl's] body." In her own defense, Kate shared that she "tried very hard to be boy-like" but it was not very easy.

Two of the girls, Kate and Lauren, indicated that they had some difficulty determining what roles some of the boys were playing in their scenes. Kate "couldn't tell between the mother and the father until [Ethan] seemed interested in the trees." As well, Lauren felt "it was hard to recognize if you haven't read the story, that [Will] was just a lost girl."

Many of the girls commented on Neil's performance of the grandmother. Alison's comments nicely reflected the other girls' observations, believing that Neil "got into character with his legs crossed and his old grouchy grandma voice."

In reflection, the boys mentioned that their scenes were much shorter than the same scenes done by the girls. Norman mentioned how the lines the girls added to their presentation from "Boys and Girls" were well chosen and helped to capture the characters. For his group, he felt that Will needed "to capture characters more. We could have been more prepared." He felt all the presentations were strong, but was concerned about Barbara's portrayal of the father, believing that she "could have used more sarcasm." As well, Neil, a member of Norman's group, also felt that the girls who did the same scene as his group did performed much better. "The girls did a better job at the scene than us. We just read from the story while they made up their own lines." Andrew, the third member of the group, also noted that his group's presentation "seemed a lot shorter." He did not think that his group did a very good job. "The girls, I think had it easier because they can relate with the people in the story." To make his point more clear, he noted how Ethan was "not that good at being a female."

Aaron, sharing his observations on a girls' scene from "Butcher Bird" felt that "they seemed to find it less humorous when he was mocking Mr. Garfield." In another girls' group, he indicated that the line "oh shut up" was not as he thought it would be.

As much as I noticed the girlish movements that Anna had in portraying the father, one of the boys, Kurt, concentrated more on her line delivery, indicating that she "sounded like the father, with a grouchy sarcastic voice."

These role-play presentations were very thought provoking. Overall, I felt that the characters whose gender matched the student were the best interpreted. For example, Anna was able to capture the sarcasm of the father in her voice, but her posture and little hand gestures were unmistakably female. Darren, who portrayed the same role directly following Anna's group was much more angry and sarcastic and purposefully distanced himself from the others both physically and emotionally.

I was also surprised that two of the three mixed sex groupings selected to present from "Butcher Bird" as I didn't feel the students had reacted to the story with the same interest and confidence as they did "Boys and Girls."

Watching the oral presentations, I realized that this type of presentation must be hard for some students to complete, especially if they are being asked to portray a gender that is opposite of their own. Perhaps the students who took on roles that did not match their gender were concerned about peer pressure and ridicule and therefore did not present their character clearly, even though they analyzed and knew him or her well.

Reflections on the Written and Oral Assignments

Again I turned to the students' metacognitive learning journals to see what their perceptions and reflections were relating to the two assignments given to close the unit. Only five girls and four boys made specific comments in their metacognitive journals.

The four boys discussed the oral scene presentations and were all a part of the same group and only two of them made specific comments related to the writing assignment. Kurt felt that the:

"group scene portrayal assignment was pretty easy…mainly because we did

not have too many lines to go through, and not much thought had to be put into the creative process. Our group worked smoothly, without argument, and we all had the same idea on what story we were going to use a scene from, which was 'Butcher Bird.' I found that males in our class mainly liked the story better than the rest, mainly because it was more appealing to males than 'Boys and Girls.'

He shared that the "scene…where the father shoots the sparrow, seems to be a favorite among a lot of males in the class, mainly because it seems like the father is contemplating shooting the wife. That is something that livens up an otherwise uneventful short story." In one of his later metacognitive entries, Kurt reflects on the female part he had to play in the presentation, noting that "playing the part of a female without actually having to look like a female was perfectly fine for me. With props not being necessary, I could easily make a non-feminine interpretation of a rather feminine character: the mother from 'Butcher Bird'."

Mason revealed that his group was "going to do the last scene where the father ends up shooting the bird" from the story "Butcher Bird." His group was "doing this scene because [they] felt the most comfortable with this story. Everyone in the group feels that it will be easier to portray the characters."

Aaron wrote about the factors that affected their scene choice. "The line length was a big factor. If they were not long and detailed they were good for us. In that scene we were also shooting something which was a factor. There has to be some kind of action in our presentation. We don't like just conversation in a presentation." He also discussed how the character parts were distributed in the group, writing that "Mac and I chose our parts first and Kurt got stuck with the mother character. He did not complain to much because he did not have to dress up and he was able to not really act as a female." In reflection of his group's presentation, he felt that "today's presentation went pretty good. Now that I think of it there is no way we could have screwed up. It was pretty much improvised."

Mac, who was a part of Mason's group seemed surprised "at how well our group presented our little skit. I was really impressed on how well Mason wrote it out, because he couldn't be here to participate." He noted in his metacognitive journal that he had decided to do the father for the writing assignment, but he "found it really hard to take on the persona of the father. It was hard to write in away that it didn't sound

[whiny]. I found it kinda easier to write in the way he was feeling. I got pretty much all I wanted to say in the forty minutes."

Aaron was the only boy who directly commented on his choice of persona for the writing assignment. He noted that if he "were to put myself into the role of a character in one of the short stories we read, I would choose the father in the butcher bird. I feel I could place myself in his position. I also pictured his character in my head really well. I also put up with nagging quite a bit so I know how he feels. I can see him getting quit stern with his wife and ignoring her when she says don't shoot the bird. The other characters in the other stories did not seem real to me."

Lisa "really enjoyed all of the presentations…Some of them were really funny but all could still use a little work. Doing oral presentations are interesting because everyone got involved. I am surprised that we did not have a big discussion like we do every other day."

As well, Lauren was impressed with the quality of the presentations. It surprised her "how lots of the guys really got into their role as women (Neil, Kurt!)." She "also thought Barbara's [portrayal] of the dad in "Butcher Bird" was also good except she started out really loud then went quiet."

Alison seemed quite frustrated when she described the group work portion where the scenes were chosen and rehearsed. It was at this time that each same sex group was paired with a group of the opposite gender in order to discuss the scenes they wished to choose together. One female member of the group had chosen "a scene with one person in it and then got mad when we told her we wanted to do something else. A scene with one person would never work well because our male group has four people in it and I don't think that they would go for that." She goes on to describe how the two groups finally did select a scene, but did not feel confident that with the time wasted that the "presentation will be done very well. We just read it out normally and it will probably be boring."

In reflection of other group's scenes, Alison found some strengths. She "thought she was going to die laughing when Rachel, Barbara and Amy's group presented. They showed an example of a stereotype. They put together the usual male/female stereotypes with the voice of the 1930's farmer." In reference to Kate, Lisa and Lauren's group, Alison felt that their "group did a good job. They always do good at presentations in class. I think it's because they always speak loudly and clearly. They make it interesting and creative. They also always put a lot of

enthusiasm into their work."

Rachel and Lauren were the only students who made comments in their metacognitive journals about the writing assignment that had them writing from the persona of a character they choose from one of the two short stories studied in the project. Lauren's comments were the most detailed. She started her entry by stating how she "really liked how my persona turned out. I already knew what I was going to do because the day before you had mentioned. I then decided in my mind all of the qualities that I had picked out from the story that I felt the father in the "Butcher Bird" had. I added lots of [sarcasm], because, like you said the father [possessed] alot of it throughout the entire story." She also talks about some of the challenges the assignment posed, noting that "it was also fairly hard trying not to sound whiny. I tried not to say to much 'oh my [wife's] nagging at me and I hate Mr. Garfield' but of course I had to mention it because it was in his character." Rachel simply stated that she "decided to do Mr. Garfield as my character analysis because I felt a strong connection with his character. Plus there is lots of dialogue. Mr. Garfield is a well described character by the narrator."

Looking back over these two extension assignments, I could see many parallels between what occurred in the assignments in my classroom and in Gabriel's (1990) study. Her study revealed that "some males and females are indeed reading the same text differently and in accordance with a gender-based schema that they have brought to the reading of the text" (p. 137). The girls and the boys certainly found that they could relate to specific characters that matched their gender much better than ones that did not. None of the girls felt any strong disdain towards any of the literature we studied in the project, but the some of the boys certainly expressed strong dislike for a specific story and the types of responses they were required to craft. As well, looking over the response journals, the literature discussions and the extension assignments together, the boys and girls did focus on different details, creating different interpretations of the same literature.

I certainly do not think that these different interpretations can be or should be separated into right and wrong, but that the discussion of the literature in the open forum allowed a variety of ideas to be shared, enriching the overall reading experience. Girls got to hear their voices and ideas and the boys got to hear their own. As well, each gender gets to hear the voices of the other, perhaps allowing for some sense of understanding that may not have occurred without the voices of both genders

represented.

Gabriel's (1990) study also suggested that "Writing assignments will have to be designed to address the gender-based schema of males and females and to acknowledge the power of the cultural expectations that define male and female behavior" (p. 137). I will admit that when I devised the writing assignments for the responses as well as the persona assignment, and then put together the oral scene assignment, I was not considering the student's gender based schema. I did want the students to have to crawl into the other gender's skin and attempt to demonstrate some understanding. Perhaps considering their gender schemas, this was a difficult task given the time frame. The students seemed to enjoy the task and presented some interesting interpretations of character. I honestly think that putting the students in a position where they would work harder and consult with their opposite gender partner group allowed them to come to an understanding of the characters, seeing them through new eyes.

Chapter 6
The Student Questionnaires

It seemed that in the minds of the people around me there was a steady undercurrent of thought, not to be deflected, on this one subject.
Alice Munro

Following the completion of the in-class project, I decided to select four students, two boys and two girls, to interview. I felt I could get more specific information related to my study in a one on one situation, especially after the students had worked through the project. At first, I had decided to conduct tape-recorded interviews. However, time constraints became a first issue. The project ended up extending one of my units and I had some concerns about finishing the course work. As well, the person I had arranged to borrow the appropriate recording equipment had gone on leave due to illness so I no longer had access to the technology I needed. Therefore, I decided to create a questionnaire of the interview questions and send them home with the selected students over the summer. The students could take their time to respond and then mail the questionnaire back to me, using the self-addressed stamped envelope I provided.

The interview questions I created were developed as the project progressed. Some of them were questions that had arisen in the classroom, students posed some and others were questions I have had since the beginning of my inquiry.

I decided on the four students to include in this questionnaire sample after the round table discussion had occurred on the story "Boys and Girls." The lively shift in discussion, as well as a peak at the students' learning journals gave me a very solid indication of who I would like to question further and more specifically. In my research journal, I noted after the round table that I thought "Mason would make a neat interview subject…or Neil…just from the comments made." I also noted that I was thinking of "Kate and Rachel so far for the girls from their comments as well." As the project came to a close, I realized that my initial choices had not changed, so I forwarded copies of the eleven questions to those four students.

The students were asked to complete the questionnaires over the summer holidays and place their responses in a self-addressed manila envelope. I received completed questionnaires from Mason, Neil and Rachel. Unfortunately, Kate never

submitted the questionnaire to me, even after I extended the deadline and asked her to forward it to me as soon as she could. What follows are the responses provided to me by the two boys, Mason and Neil, and the one girl, Rachel. Because of the time that had passed from the completion of the in-class project, I chose not to approach another female student with the questionnaire.

In what ways do you see a journal as an effective or ineffective learning tool in your English classroom? How do you tackle writing the variety of responses required of you in this course (spontaneous, first look, second look, metacognitive)?

In response to the first question, the two boys had very disparate answers. In his journal, Neil shared his feelings very bluntly.

> For the most part, I find that the journal is an ineffective learning tool. I also see it as a waste of time. I don't see the point of writing stuff down that you figure out in your head. I really didn't see the point of doing all that metacognition stuff in my journal…It helped a little, just writing stuff that [I] thought so I wouldn't forget it later but I could have just jotted a few point form notes down on a sheet of paper.

Mason felt very differently about the effectiveness of journals.

> I see the journal as an effective learning tool [even though] I may not enjoy doing them. The journal is a way to explore the literature we read in and out of the classroom. It [allows] us to explore and take risks at the same time and also lets us [practice] some of the writing skills we learn in class. Overall I do believe it is an effective learning tool in those ways but I do think it is not as effective as it could be. I know that it could be more effective if we could do the journal in the classroom.

Rachel felt that the learning or metacognitive responses were of the most benefit to her and shared the ways in which she tackled the variety of journal

responses required of her in the course.

> I see the learning journals as effective. As students, writing everyday helps us keep up our writing skill. After grade six (writing so many short stories), we run the risk of losing our newly developed skill. I think the journals will have some use to us in grade 12 but I don't know what yet. It cannot be an ineffective tool, since every night you are reviewing and expanding on what you [learned] that day. It is almost studying everyday for 6 months which is recommended by Alberta Education, but what student does that?
>
> For spontaneous response I just wrote whatever came to my head. Usually there was class given time so it was an extremely spontaneous response after I read the story. For first and second look, I struggled with [it] since it was a new concept to me, the handout did help though. Metacognitive response was easy since we had been doing it last year. Plus, it left lots of room for opinions so I had no problem!

In response to how the variety of journal entries are tackled, again, Neil shared a clear opinion.

> Well I think I can sum up how I tackle any journal entry in this phrase, "Dammit! Another journal entry." The only journals that I sorta looked forward too were the gender ones.

Mason did not directly respond to how he tackles the entries, but did share some concerns he had about the way in which they were assigned.

> Most of us didn't keep up with the journals because of extracurricular activities, jobs or other homework that had to get finished. The journals may be better for junior high students or even grade 10 students but as we go through grade 11 and 12 we shouldn't have the heavy burden and extra worries that the journals bring.

Is the gender of an author a criterion you use to select literature you read for personal enjoyment? Why or why not? How important is it that the literature you read contains a protagonist who matches your gender? Explain.

In your English class, how are your engagement, appreciation and/or understanding influenced by the study of a piece of literature that contains an author, protagonist or narrator who matches your gender?

Again, the two boys had very different answers to the first part of this question. For Mason, the gender of the author was important.

> I do believe for myself the gender of an author is very important when I choose literature. Most authors write to audiences of their own sex because they understand what they want to read. I know that in the [stories] we read in class I enjoyed the [stories] that males wrote because the issues those male authors wrote about were more what I was looking for. I also understood what the male authors were trying to say. Most of the [stories] by female authors were boring and I didn't really clue into what they were trying to say.

However, Neil felt very differently about the importance of the author's gender when selecting literature to read.

> The gender of an author is not a [criterion] that I use to select literature for my personal enjoyment. I'm not sure why, it just doesn't matter to me. If it sounds like a good book I'll read it. In English class I understand literature that is written by a male better than a female.

Rachel indicated that her choices stemmed more from habit than anything else.

> Out of habit I tend to choose female authors. I think this is because one of the worst novels I ever read was by a male author and my habit evolved from there.

All three of the students felt that the gender of the protagonist did not matter to them. Neil's concerns are centred more on relating to the character.

> It's not important that in the literature I read there is a protagonist that matches my gender. It really doesn't matter to me as long as I can relate and get into the character. Most of the books that I read do have a male protagonist though.

For Mason, the 'what' of the story is more important to him than the protagonist.

> To me, it doesn't matter what gender the protagonist in a story is. It depends on what the story is about but both male and female protagonists can make a story interesting. In [English] class I find that I am interested more in stories that are written by males. It doesn't matter on the gender of the protagonist or the [narrator] but usually if the [narrator] is male I am more interested.

Rachel replied to this question by focussing on the choices she makes because of the writing assignment required after reading.

> When it comes to writing an essay and there is a story with a male protagonist and another with a female protagonist, I have the tendency to choose the female story. I usually find more information and maybe I am afraid of the male story because as a female I will probably derive the wrong meaning to an idea. When it comes to authors chosen in English class I don't look because it has been already [chosen] and I won't let the fact it is a male author bother me.

In what ways does your English course meet your reading preferences? In what ways does it not? Provide specific examples and details.

All three of the students agreed, for the most part, that their English course does not meet their personal reading preferences. Mason wrote that the course did not meet his reading preferences because he is a non-reader.

> English class doesn't really meet my reading preferences because I am not really into reading. What [English] did for me was it got me looking for literature that I might be interested in and you know what I think I found it. After reading Night by Elie Wiesel I realized that is the type of literature I am interested in. It gives me a way to see what others went through in a time of turmoil and understand how they felt living in that horrible period of time.

Neil felt that his reading preferences were not met because of the particular genres he enjoys reading personally.

> The English course for the most part doesn't meet my reading preferences. The stuff I usually read is science fiction, fiction (usually something to do with war), thrillers, and horror. I haven't seen a lot of this in English. The stuff that I enjoyed in English was Shakespeare and *Billy Bishop Goes to War.*

Rachel acknowledged that her preferences are not met in the classroom, but does not see that as a disadvantage.

> I enjoy reading good romance novels. I like doing this on my own. I understand that the English classroom cannot [accommodate] my reading interests and quite frankly, I don't think I would enjoy reading [fantasy]. I think the English courses have done a great job of getting interesting short stories. The short stories chosen have ranged from death to happiness. English has broadened my horizon by giving me poems, Shakespeare and stories that deal with flashbacks and such. I am happy English doesn't cover everything I like to read because then I would not have any free reading time.

Do you believe any of your high school courses to be either "male" or "female" courses? Explain your point of view.

All three of the students firmly agreed that specific courses could be seen as "male" or "female" courses. Rachel focussed her discussion on two subjects, English

and Math.

> I think English is an extremely fem. course since it is female habit/nature to analyze and express human emotions. We, as females, enjoy talking and reading; it is just another form. If you were to ask a guy, to explain his feelings towards a story, it would be brief and short. He would probably be left asking "Who cares?" Whereas math is male course. Overall, men/boys can do better at math. I believe it is all in whether you are male or female. God decided to add variety.

Neil shared his views about the science and English courses.

> There's definitely male and female courses. In Math, Chem, Bio, and Physics, males seem to do better than females. In these courses there is only one right answer. In English females seem to do better than males. In English there is a grey area. You have to interpret stuff.

Mason too shared his perceptions and experiences relating to English courses and the science and math courses.

> I [definitely] believe that some courses are more fit for one gender. English for example I really think that it is a course more suited for females. Girls are usually more open to discuss literature and it also seems they find it easier to write about. Most guys that I know don't care about what the significance of a person drinking water is in a story. I really find it hard to find the elements in literature that most girls find right away. English is probably the only core subject that I find a female subject. The other courses are dominated by both sexes having good grades, but males are [definitely] better in science and math courses.

In what ways do you believe your understanding and enjoyment of literature, in English class, is influenced by your teacher? Does the gender of your teacher affect this at all? Explain.

All of the students agreed that their teacher certainly influences their understanding and enjoyment of literature in their English class. However, only Rachel felt that the gender of the teacher did not bear any influence. Mason focussed his response on the idea of having a male English teacher.

> I do believe that my understanding [and] enjoyment of literature is influenced by the teacher. If I had a male teacher in my [English] class I might enjoy and understand the literature better. I feel that a male teacher might be able to teach me in a way I understand but since I have never had a male [English] teacher [I'm] not sure my thoughts are correct. I may feel uncomfortable with a male teaching [English] because all through my life I have had a female in the classroom. The one thing I do believe is that if I had a male teacher I would probably enjoy more of the literature that we study because since the teacher is male he would probably teach stories that he better understands which means they would attract male readers more than females.

Neil too acknowledged that he is unsure about whether the gender of the teacher would affect his understanding and enjoyment as he has never had a male English teacher.

> Your enjoyment of literature is influenced by the teacher. If the teacher makes the literature interesting it's more enjoyable. I don't know if the gender of the teacher affects this because I have never had a male English teacher.

Rachel described her experiences with English teachers from elementary language arts through to high school and focussed on their reading recommendations to frame her response.

> Before I entered high school I hardly ever listened to my elementary/junior high [English] teachers, since they were trying to push short stories and novel series (eg. Nancy Drew, Hardy Boys, Sweet Valley High). I enjoy reading, and as a reader I am always looking for new and interesting material. Maybe because of your book talks, I found it easier to find new novels and ask for advice. I prefer novels recommended by people who have actually read them.

I found with my other teacher's they would say, "this won a Governor General Award." Personally I don't care what it has won. Hopefully the books that English teachers [recommend] have some sort of connection to the theory the students are studying in class.

No, if I think the teacher has good reading preference I'll ask. I think teacher can judge what a student may enjoy reading and [recommend].

What do you believe are the benefits to a round table discussion of literature, where the teacher remains in the background as a facilitator? What do you believe are the disadvantages to this type of activity?

All three of the students seemed to feel that the round table discussion opportunities were beneficial. Neil felt that the main advantage was the ability to talk and bring up more ideas than someone would see at first.

A benefit is that it lets the students talk about what they see as important in the piece eof literature. Also more ideas are brought up in the round table discussion. The main disadvantage of this is that an important idea may be missed. With our round table discussion in class I also found that a lot of the ideas were being repeated over and over, which I found to be a waste of time and a little annoying.

Mason felt very positive about the round table discussion experience, noting about the advantages to independent thinking and learning provided with the absence of full teacher direction and questioning.

In round table discussions I feel students are able to better understand how to find elements like irony in a story. Since the teacher isn't present during the discussion we have to think for ourselves to come up with different ideas. This is a good type of learning because instead of [listening] to what the teacher has to say and probably forgetting stuff we hear we have to get our brains working

> and we end up remembering how to go about finding elements of literature. The one thing that is bad about not having a teacher present is that we may be finding something that couldn't be possible so we are [learning] to find the wrong thing but overall round table discussions [definitely] benefit students.

Rachel felt that the round table discussion were beneficial but provided a list of criteria she felt must be in place in order for the process to work efficiently and effectively.

> I think the round table effect works efficiently, if the teacher butts in if students are going on the wrong track. I know when you make a mistake and don't correct it, for a long time students will have the wrong idea in their head. This round table only works well if the students know what literary elements to look for (a good knowledge of terms). It helps if there are leaders that begin the discussion and let back to allow the shyer ones to come through. As always there needs to be variety so students aren't bored (not overdone). A quick summary and any new items could be done by the teacher at the end of the class to brief all those students who fell asleep.

Do you enjoy working alone or in groups? Explain. In your opinion, what makes group work effective? Ineffective?

The students' responses to the first part of this question varied. Mason definitely liked working in groups.

> For myself, I prefer working in groups. I like to get to know how other people untangle their literature and sometimes I understand other [people's] methods more than my own. In a group we get to bounce ideas off of [each other] and even [criticize] other peoples ideas. I really feel that there is nothing wrong with group work except sometimes groups can get off topic very easily.

Neil was somewhat split, enjoying group work, but preferring to work alone

when it was necessary to complete a task.

> For enjoyment purposes I like working in groups. For getting work done I would rather work alone. Working in groups you get to be with friends, you talk, goof around, and have fun. For me working with your friends makes group work ineffective for the above reasons. Also members of a group that do not do their share of work make group work ineffective. I would rather work with people that I don't know very well. When I have worked in a group like this we seem to have gotten more work done than when I have worked with friends.

Rachel opened her response by clearly stating that she likes to work alone.

> I enjoy working alone. I like to know the work is done and done well. Usually in a group there is one person who thinks you should do the work and they will benefit from the mark. Sometimes I have thrown these people for a loop by not doing the work at all or assigning the tough parts. With my friends none of us are slackers and each one of us pulls our share. I know not [every] time I get to work with people I'm used to. This year I went once with Ellen and Kate in a group. It did not go well. We didn't feel comfortable to full discuss what we had to do. Plus we ended up working overtime to get the project done because of this. I used to enjoy group work when I was younger because I could chat and nothing was organized, but now things count for marks (more pressure to be efficient).

What differences/similarities did you notice between working with same sex groups and mixed sex groups?

The responses from the two boys and from Rachel for this question showed quite a bit of variety. Rachel's response showed a positive reaction to same sex groups and a negative reaction to mixed sex groups.

I don't have much to say on this topic. In mixed sex groups nothing gets done because we joke around (even if we don't like each other, so don't read into it!). Same sex groups work because they are usually with my friends (all girls).

Neil had a somewhat opposite reaction to same sex and mixed sex groupings.

A couple similarities that I noticed were that there was a dominant speaker from both groups and that both groups had basically the same ideas. One difference was the amount of note taking. The chicks seemed to be taking more notes than the guys. Also I found that some of the ideas from the girls seemed more vague than ours. Furthermore the mixed group work was more centered on working. We goofed around a lot in our same sex groups. Mason agreed with Neil's perceptions of the amount of work that was accomplished in the mixed sex groups.

After changing into mixed sex groups I found that the girls had alot more ideas to share than the males did. Usually the females dominated the discussions in the mixed sex groups. Sometimes I felt like the time we spent in our same sex groups was wasted because the girls had so many more ideas to share. The only similarity I found was that the groups got off of topic very easily.

What do you believe are the benefits of a written response to literature assigned prior to any class discussion or activity? What do you believe are the disadvantages to this type of writing?

The two boys certainly saw some advantages and disadvantages to assigning this type of written response prior to class discussion. Mason saw this type of writing assignment as one that generates ideas and allows students to better participate in class discussion.

I believe there are many benefits to doing a written response assigned prior to

> class discussions or activities. It forces us to look for elements like symbols on our own instead of just writing down notes during the discussion. Also it gives everybody a chance to share what they have found. Instead of only two or three people dominating a conversation everyone has a chance to talk. The one disadvantage is that when we do a written response than we discuss the story for a few days then we do an assignment it tends to get a little much and we end up getting tired of the whole thing.

Neil felt that the main advantage is the ability to get down ideas so they are not forgotten.

> Again the only benefit of a written response that I see is writing down ideas so that you don't forget them. I guess assigning a written response about the piece makes the student analyze it a little is another benefit. I don't really see any disadvantages other than the added homework.

Personally, Rachel saw no advantages and mentions no disadvantages to this type of writing assignment, but suggested ways in which it could be of benefit to specific students.

> None, since I never did have enough time. I think the idea would work well and would give students a chance to study the literature closely before hand. Students who learn more slowly, would have the opportunity of more time to study.

In what ways has your notion of gender been changed or influenced after completing the activities on "Boys and Girls" and "Butcher Bird"? In what ways did these short stories reinforce your already established notions of gender?

Interestingly, Neil and Rachel indicated in their responses that their study of the stories and the completion of the activities did not change their notions of gender at all. Rachel shared her personal journey towards understanding the male gender by

talking about her brothers.

> I don't think my opinion has changed at all, since I am constantly influenced into understanding the difference between guys and girls. My five brothers helped me out on this. In "Boys and Girls" the protagonist was lucky she didn't get hurt. In my experience playing with boys only got you hurt (shattered elbow, burnt neck, smashed fingers, oil and paint in my eyes). Mom always said "Stay inside and play with your dolls." I should have listened and saved myself from alot of pain.

> I couldn't connect with "Butcher Bird." The conflicts seemed to far away for me to even remotely understand. As a girl when your young you have a better understanding of your father than when your older. I don't know what it is like to be a small boy watching my father and being scared of him.

Neil felt that the reason his notions of gender were not influenced in any way had to do with the short stories, which were set too far in the past to be relevant to him.

> My notions of gender have not been changed or influenced in any way after completing the activities on the short stories. I can't say that it really reinforced my notions of gender either. Honestly I have no idea what the "Butcher Bird" had to do with any gender issues. Also I think that using more modern stories would have done a better job of showing gender issues as they apply to us.

On the contrary, Mason had a great deal to say about the ways in which the two short stories spoke to him about gender issues.

> After reading the "Butcher Bird" I [definitely] realized that women rely on material goods more than men do which is what the guys basically thought of women in the first place. I feel that women don't understand what men have to go through to provide for the family and that is exactly what the story "Butcher Bird" was trying to say. In the story "Boys and Girls" it was different. The

girl wanted to do work that her father did. Because of that she understood how difficult it is to provide for the family. I thought that the girl should have been able to do what she wanted. It makes me realize men are biased towards women too. In those days women expected men to raise the money and men expected women to stay at home and cook and take care of the children but that attitude has [definitely] changed.

Which class activities did you enjoy the 'most' and the 'least' during our study of "Boys and Girls" and "Butcher Bird"? Explain using specific details and examples.

Each of the three students had different favorite and least favorite activities. Rachel particularily enjoyed the round table discussion opportunities and the study of film, but did not find the responses to the stories she was required to write useful.

I enjoyed the round table discussion since it was the first time I've tried it. I didn't like the second and third look responses because I had a hard time understanding how to do it. I didn't see a [growth] in my work and found these responses useless. The movie of "Boys and Girls" was interesting to watch. We went through and analyzed the director/author choices. I think this helped us later on while studying *Macbeth*.

In contrast to Rachel, Neil did not find the round table discussion at all enjoyable, but did have fun doing many of the activities centred on gender stereotype.

The activities that I enjoyed the most were the ones that showed the stereotypes. The collage things was one of these. It was a fun class. The thing that I ended up liking the least was the round table discussion. It started off fun with "Boys and Girls", but gradually the discussion became stagnant.

Mason, unlike Rachel, did not enjoy analyzing and discussing the film version of "Boys and Girls" but enjoyed the scene presentation assignment at the close of the project.

> The one activity that I really enjoyed was were we got into our mixed sex groups and acted out a scene we liked from one of the stories. It was interesting how differently our female partners interpreted the scene from my male group. [Even though] I wasn't there the day the scenes were performed I saw my groups and they were quite different. The one activity that I didn't like at all was watching the "Boys and Girls" video and noticing the differences between the movie and the short story. I found that it was a big waste of time.

Reflections on Student Responses

As I sent the questionnaires home with the students over their summer holidays, I remember wondering if I would receive them back at all or if I would get something I could use in my study that would not require me to do a great deal of follow up. Summer holidays do limit that sort of endeavor. I must admit, I was more than pleased with the responses I received from the three students who responded to the questions posed. Although many of the questions were ones repeated from Activity 7, I did receive some thoughtful and honest comments from the three students that have informed me a great deal about the impact of my choices in the classroom.

As I have mentioned, journals are consistently used in some form in my classroom. Two of the students saw the value in both the reader's response journal and the metacognitive journal. They noted that the daily writing task gave them opportunities to work on their writing skills and explore literature. However, there were comments about the journals not being used to their full potential and perhaps being a waste of time. They were also seen as a huge homework burden and something that perhaps was better suited for junior high students. Students seemed to appreciate class time given for reflection rather than having the journal entries required out of class.

Although the reaction to journals seemed somewhat negative, I know that the daily ritual gave the students the needed writing practice in a variety of forms, both personal and critical. I would like to spend some time thinking about ways to have students respond and work with literature in other ways within the journal response format. Perhaps the use of student dialogue journals or stream of consciousness

writing could be used. Perhaps the audience for the journal needs to be someone other than me with the red pen. One thing I have realized is that sometimes a familiar assignment or response format simply breeds the 'not another journal entry' comment. Students do gain from the daily writing ritual that journals create, but perhaps it is the word 'journal' that fosters the negativity towards that type of response.

When it comes to the gender of the author or protagonist, the students tried to tell me that it didn't matter, but it really seemed to matter to them. The two boys felt that they better understood and related to works written by males about male characters. The one girl also felt that she was drawn to stories written by females about female characters. Neil contradicted himself saying that his only criterion for selecting a book for enjoyment was whether the book "sounds good" but then qualified that statement by saying in English class he better understood works written by males. Mason too felt that the stories centred on female characters were boring and he had no idea what they were trying to say. So, in what ways are the classroom activities not helping both the boys and the girls in the room come to understandings about characters whose gender does not match their own?

Pace and Townsend (1999) believe that a dialogic classroom allows for students to take control of their learning. It is a place where "multiple perspectives are genuinely valued, no single perspective is naturalized beyond interrogation…there is opportunity for stereotypes to be questioned, for biases to be unearthed" (p. 48). The round table discussions implemented in this study did allow for both voices to be heard, but from what the questionnaires revealed they didn't seem to be allowing for insight into the stories for students whose gender did not match the author or protagonist. They certainly allowed the students to share more ideas and to work together to create some sense of understanding, but the students still felt they didn't understand or couldn't relate to some aspects of each story.

The students were also quite concerned about the amount of control they were given over the direction of the discussion. They were worried about either missing ideas, spending too much time repeating ideas or even being off track and not being aware of it. I think that their confidence would build, as they became more accustomed to making meaning on their own, with me as a guide for learning. I know I will continue to use this discussion format in my classroom, but will have to look at variations, and perhaps using it less often so that I can avoid having what Neil indicates is a "stagnant" class and what Rachel indicates are bored and sleeping

students.

Having the students step into the shoes of a character opposite to their own gender seemed enjoyable, but not one of the questionnaire responses indicated that this activity helped the students understand or appreciate the literature. After reading these responses I believe that in the future, a balanced presentation of both male and female voices is going to be important. As well, activities need to be designed to bring all students into the literature to gain understanding and appreciation – not just the students whose gender matches the author or protagonist. Perhaps even the students will be able to inform me about what activities would give them the understanding and appreciation they seem to be lacking. I support Pace and Townsend's (1999) notion that a classroom full of discourse is one that can facilitate understanding. However, I will have to consider ways to create this dialogic classroom and to develop activities to compliment the dialogue in order to facilitate more appreciate and understanding of the literature studied.

It was not a real surprise to me to learn that the students did not feel that their reading preferences were met in their English class. They did indicate works they enjoyed. I was pleased to hear this as I always tell my students that one goal of their English course is to find one piece of literature they truly enjoy. At the time of the questionnaires, I had no idea the impact that the book *Night* had had on Mason. I had recommended he read the book for his booktalk requirement and he then willingly re-read it the next year for English 30 and then prepared it diligently for the English 30 diploma examination. It was this choice reading assignment that allowed him to find a piece of literature that spoke to him. The others also mention that what they choose to read outside of the class is not what is studied in class. Rachel didn't see this as a disadvantage though, noting that English class has opened her eyes to types of literature she would never have encountered otherwise.

I never really realized how much of an impact some of my 'for bonus marks' reading assignments were having on my students. They seemed to really enjoy the freedom to choose rather than being told what to read, or to read this because it is 'good literature.' I know that I will continue to incorporate opportunities for students to read what they wish to read to compliment some of the literature choices I make for them.

Because the students have not had experience with a male English teacher, they were unsure about the impact of the teacher's gender on their understanding and

appreciation of the works they studied. Mason hypothesized that a male would make literature selections that would appeal more to male readers and may use language he would understand better when teaching, but was unsure of how comfortable he would feel with a male English teacher. I am unsure at this point if my gender had any impact on my students. I think because I have taught them for their whole high school career that they have become comfortable with me as their teacher. They have come to know my routines and me and know what to expect in the classroom. Any change, be it male or female, would create some degree of uncertainty in their minds. I think Neil said it best when he said that "if the teacher makes the literature interesting it's more enjoyable." As long as I show an interest and display a passion for what I am doing with the students in the classroom, I don't think my gender will have a significant impact on the students.

All of the students seemed to enjoy working in groups for the social aspect, but realized that little work was done as groups got off topic easily. In implementing the new Senior High English Language Arts Program, I have come to realize that the work I have had the students do in groups is not as effective as it could be. The Senior High English Language Arts Program of Studies (2001) indicates that as students "collaborate with others, [they] demonstrate that they understand and employ group processes. They cooperate with others as they contribute to the processes that their groups are using to complete tasks" (p. 61). Collaborative learning provides much more structure for the students, and puts them in charge of their learning through taking on roles, setting goals and prioritizing and assigning tasks. I have experimented with this approach and find it works much better. Students have more on task time, come to appreciate the skills of others and create much better products. I will continue to have students work together in small and large groups; but rather than remove myself and the students from the process of teamwork, I will continue to emphasize the social skills that are required for people to work together.

As much as the students seemed to begrudge more writing assignments, they all saw the benefit of writing about a piece of literature before the class studied it. Students could be better prepared for discussion, could get down ideas so they would not be forgotten and could actively analyze the literature assigned. I too see the value of these types of reader's response assignments, but I am unsure as to whether a restrictive format is good for all students. To provide a structure may give students a place to start, but could diminish their creativity, imagination, voice, and growth as

writers if they are not allowed to break through the walls of the format provided. I like Jerry Wowk's response format and will continue to introduce it to my students. However, I will also encourage them to move beyond that format, designing the organizing principles they feel best represent their individual responses to the texts we study.

Overall, the students seemed to enjoy participating in the study, mostly I think because they were given a chance to talk about issues that were meaningful to them within the context of the literature. Perhaps this understanding shows how important context is to the study of literature. I would like to consider including more activities that engage students' prior knowledge and understanding of the underlying issues or themes within the text before the text is explored. Truly in establishing context and background knowledge the possibilities are endless. I think it will be absolutely vital in my classroom activity planning process to tap into a few more of those possibilities.

Chapter 7
Interpretations and Suggestions for Further Research

It was not something I wanted to see; just the same, if a thing really happened, it was better to see it, and know.

Alice Munro

As I sit back and reflect on the entire research project, I feel somewhat overwhelmed with its scope. I thought this project might give me some insight into the choices I was making, and how those choices impacted my students. However, it ended up revealing so much more. As well, there were many initial ideas I had about how I wanted to structure the project and who I wanted to work with that did not work out as I had planned, leading me to believe that there are many more studies embedded in this research.

The project ended well over a year ago and I know that many of the honest comments made by students have changed some of my perceptions about teaching English language arts and will continue to do so in the future. This chapter outlines the many new understandings as well as new questions that have arisen from this project.

New Understandings from My Colleagues

Although I wish I had more time to chat with my colleagues via email, I know that their input has given me some new things to think about when it comes to selecting literature and activities. I now realize that there are many factors that can influence a teacher's selection of stories to share with students. Personal preference, in the realm of enjoyment or literary merit, certainly plays a huge role in what I and my colleagues select to teach. In larger centres, cultural representation is also important and should perhaps be something that I look at in the future in all of my units. I did present a non-fiction travel unit to these same students in their English 30 course, which took them on many reading journeys all over the world and the response was quite positive. Perhaps exposing them to more than just non-fiction with an international flavor is something I should be considering as I plan for my courses.

The idea that the literature must appeal to all students is still a difficult concept

to bring to life in the classroom. Even two of my students recognized how difficult it would be to provide reading opportunities that every student enjoyed. However, Mark has made me realize that gender is something to take into consideration as the literature and activities are selected. If journals do tend to elicit stronger responses from girls because of the perception of journal writing as personal writing, then perhaps, as Mark has implemented, journal writing can be asked for in the classroom, but called by another name. I believe all students should be asked to connect to a text and should be asked to critically respond to a text, but it does not necessarily have to be in journal or essay form. If brain research has shown me anything it is that there are many other ways to get students to show their understanding of text than the less than simple act of writing.

I have to admit that I was surprised at how little influence outside factors play. As far as my colleagues were concerned, parents, administrators and textbooks do not seem to play a significant role in what they select to teach and the activities they design. Evan did indicate how important it is to involve students in the selection of stories and activities. I have to admit, after reading my student journals and seeing their reaction to two of the choice activities they were given during their English 20 semester, *The Wild Story Ride* and the book talks, I also have come to realize how important it is to allow students some choice in the text they encounter. *The Wild Story Ride* allows students to select short stories they wish to read and to respond to them personally and critically. Book talks give students the freedom to select and discuss books they wish to read for credit in the course. These activities certainly create a classroom that comes closer to meeting the reading needs of students.

As I reflect on my colleagues' downplaying of outside influences, I actually feel quite pleased. It shows that these three professionals are being given the trust and support they need to deliver a solid English program to their students. They all seemed quite emphatic about how much the texts and the outside interest groups do not affect their professional judgement and I think these bold statements are ones that I can carry with me. In no way should I feel like I have to second-guess my decisions in the classroom, as I know I am making them with the students in mind.

I am also pleased to see how many changes my colleagues make to their units each year. They recognize for themselves that they can not just stick to the same selections because it can create boredom, for both them and their students. As well, many of the changes are made to suit the needs of the new group of students the

teachers face each year.

Perhaps some of my reluctance to make changes at this time has more to do with my busy life at home than my own personal convictions. I too made many changes in the first five years of my teaching career, and relied more on the successful morsels once I became a busy mom and a busy English teacher. I have always believed that the more interested I was in the stories, the more passionate and fun my classroom would become, but after this project, I have come to realize that my passion and fun doesn't always translate for students. Providing students with some choice allows them to bring their strengths and areas of interest into the classroom as well as learn about the preferences, strengths and interests of others.

All of my colleagues expressed how important it is for teachers to communicate with each other and share their ideas. I agree with all of them when they say that professional dialogue can be very influential as I find myself constantly amazed by what others are doing in their classrooms. Professional gatherings of English teachers, like the ones that occur at the English Language Arts Council Conference held in Alberta locales every year are beneficial not only for its sessions, but for the little teaching anecdotes you can pick up from the table beside you at lunch. I know English teachers are starved to talk about their craft and do so in abundance if the forum is available. Perhaps this is a biased opinion as I personally feel a bit isolated in my small school, but I don't get the impression from my colleagues that I am too far off in my interpretations.

If the dialogue that occurs between fellow professionals is so valuable, perhaps dialogue from the students can also be important. I know now, after reading my students metacognitive journals so closely for the project, that students will reflect on what is going on in their English classrooms if they are asked. Not all of the comments were positive, but they certainly revealed a great deal of what goes on in the minds of those who inhabit the desks in front of me each day. I know now that students do see things such as journal writing and round table discussions as valuable. I also know how much I tend to over do things, such as round table discussions and group work, believing that if they work well, I should just keep doing them. I have also realized that this repetition or lack of variety in activities can have a negative effect on my students. I have learned a great deal about boys and how much they like stories that have a more physical journey than a mental one and how much they like to engage in more physical activities such as collages and oral presentations. This

dialogue has been just as valuable as that of my colleagues.

I found Mark's comments relating to gender balance and the treatment of boys in the classroom the most interesting. First, if you are an English teacher with a book room full of antiquated texts, you will probably present material very much dominated by the DWEMs (Dead White European-American Males). I know that many of the older texts that I started out with certainly presented this imbalance. Perhaps the new Senior High English Language Arts program of studies and the accompanying newly developed resources will help place the overused, older textbooks in their proper place – as support resources.

I do have to wonder why it is that Mark believes male teachers pay closer attention to gender balance in their classroom selections than females do. Perhaps this is a question that could frame a whole new study.

Second, the whole notion that schools have created classrooms that are not boy friendly is an intriguing thought. Interestingly, Sadker and Sadker (1994) clearly believe that schools create a learning environment that favors boys over girls. However, Klienfeld (1998), in a review of the AAUW's report *How Schools Shortchange Girls*, finds that it is the boys who are suffering in our classrooms and not the girls as the AAUW's report suggests. Even Gurian (2001) clearly states that the girls' dominance in certain aspects of reading and writing and boys' in certain aspects of math and science is directly linked to brain structure. Boys demonstrate significant lags in reading and writing and feel that the school climate is one that is hostile as well as one that does not encourage their success. In light of the experiences I have had teaching literature and writing to both boys and girls for the past eight years, I believe that this new brain research, as well as the apparent pendulum swing, is important for teachers to take heed of. In what ways is my English classroom not an inviting environment for boys? Do I not provide the boys in my classroom with the encouragement they need to be successful? If they aren't working as hard as the girls why is that? What kind of role models are boys being exposed to in English language arts? Again, other areas for further study.

New Understandings from the Literature and Activities

Overall, I was quite impressed with the knowledge that my students displayed regarding gender.

When I look back at the activities I designed in order to establish background knowledge related to gender, I cannot help but see them as some of the most successful lessons I have been involved with. Not because they were meticulously planned, and certainly not because they were tied to some greater literary purpose, but because all of them were engaging for the students. They generally expressed strong positive attitudes about their gender and the contributions they would make and the things they would not miss out on simply because of their maleness or femaleness.

During the discussions of gender and gender issues, the students' enthusiasm was quite infectious. They enjoyed this aspect of the project because it was something different. Most noted was the responses of many of the boys who told me how much they enjoyed doing the collages, and planning and presenting their scenes. These preferences certainly support Gurian's (2001) notion that boys are much more spatially oriented and learn best when they have an opportunity to move around the room and not just remain in a stationary desk.

I also believe that a great deal of the enthusiasm for the pre-reading gender activities centred on the fact that for the first time we weren't just discussing a piece of literature, but we were discussing meaningful ideas they felt they had strong knowledge of, even if they did take the opportunity to tease and taunt each other a bit in the process. The passion that the boys displayed in their discussion of their teachers and their experiences within the English classroom was very eye opening. I never felt, although some strong statements were made, that the boys believed I was an unfair teacher. I think they felt more like they were put in a somewhat unfair situation because their gender, and way of communicating, working, thinking – you name it – was not the same as their female teacher. I also believe that it is their perception that these differences influence their mark negatively. Roen's (1992) study revealed that male readers assigned significantly higher scores to persuasive letters written by males and female readers assigned significantly higher scores to persuasive letters written by females, regardless of a correctly identified gender label. So, as a female teacher, am I biased towards certain patterns of discourse that are considered predominately female? Roen (1992) says that I am, noting that "gender specific linguistic and rhetorical

discourse features, rather than gender stereotypes evoked by the gender labels attached to the texts, had differential effects on male and female readers" (p. 131). This new awareness is something I will have to take with me as I select, plan, assign and evaluate students' work in the future.

The activity where I asked the students to respond to any four questions relating to questions of gender in and out of the classroom, gave me some insights into the selections the students were making and how those choices could impact my future classroom decisions. According to most of my students, the author and protagonist do not necessarily need to match the gender of the reader. I found this surprising. I did not really think that many of my students, who are non-readers, would really closely look at the author when selecting something to read. However, I did think that the students would make their reading choices based on the protagonist of the story. Even though there were some students who were the exception, I have to admit that I was pleased to see that it was the quality of the story that seemed to be more important to most of my students.

The question that asked students if their reading preferences were being met in the classroom also provided me with some interesting insights. For the most part, the students felt that they were not being given the chance to read what they would choose to read for themselves. Taking into account that many of them are non-readers who have not established strong reading preferences, I am sure that many of them were not able to answer this question with complete certainty. What did take me by surprise was the sense of understanding that some of the students displayed. They realized that I had a curriculum to teach and somewhat limited resources and they seemed to respect that I was making the best choices I could. Neil even looked on the bright side of the issue stating that even though the course couldn't meet his reading preferences, it sure showed him what he didn't like to read.

What pleased me the most in the responses to this question was the positive feedback I received on the 'choice' assignments I had begun to integrate. The students had been given a chance to seek out and read short stories for a bonus assignment and were also required to read two novels outside of class, of their own choosing, for a book talk assignment. It was these two projects that the students mentioned as ways that their reading preferences could be met in the classroom. I know that even though the book talks take up most of my semesters lunch hours and they can make for tedious year to year book keeping, I will continue to require them for all my English

courses. As well, I will continue to look for ways to provide students choices in what they read in the classroom – a direction that seems to be fully supported by the new Senior High English Language Arts program.

Of course, the pre-reading activities related to gender issues were not the only activities that revealed new understandings. The round table discussions and the students' reflections on that process also revealed a great deal. Generally, the students seemed very positive about the use of this type of oral response format. I know that quite definitively through their journals as well as their desire to have the room re-arranged into the discussion circle before class would begin. Even the boys, who Tannen (1986) describes as reporters of information, became clearly engaged in sharing more than just the facts when the discussion shifted from "Boys and Girls" to a discussion of gender and their English classroom. The metacognitive journals that followed that same shift were also full of strong, descriptive emotions as well as personal experiences, opinions and insights. As Mac indicated in his journal, everyone just needed to get something off of their chest that day, and male or female, they did just that. Will all discussions of literature turn into discussions that become that meaningful to all students? I don't think so. Perhaps by stepping back and allowing the students to take control of their learning, this type of discussion simply emerged. Baym (1990) wonders how to empower students when the ultimate power must still remain with the teacher. I feel, in some ways, that the whole round table process does allow for some empowerment of both the boys and the girls. I know it is important to remain in the classroom in order to provide the guidance the students need, but I am confident that given the proper tools and encouragement, learning does occur without me at the powerful centre position, asking the questions.

As well, the two short stories we studied, "Boys and Girls" and "Butcher Bird" and the two final assignments, one written and one oral, also provided me with some interesting new insights. As much as I like the short story "Boys and Girls" the response from many of the boys was quite negative. Aaron was by far the most negative, having decided that Alice Munro was an author he didn't like because she wrote about things he felt were stupid. Flynn (1986) would characterize Aaron as having resisted or rejected the text because he failed to understand or derive meaning. Interestingly, Baym (1990) offers an alternative to Flynn's resisting or rejecting theory, indicating that Aaron's expression of dislike for both stories represented an intelligent, honest response, even if it was not deemed a correct analytical one. I was

pleased that even though Aaron did not like the two stories written by Munro, at least he felt confident enough to express his dislike, and still strive to take part in and learn from the classroom activities. He may have rejected the stories, but he did not reject the learning opportunities the stories provided.

Many students, male and female, also complained about the length of the story. I guess that passionate engagement I was hoping for didn't appear to mask the length of the reading assignment. Generally, I would say the reaction to the story was not that much different from the students' reactions to other short fiction from that term. Many of the boys had loved *Billy Bishop Goes to War* and both the boys and the girls quite enjoyed *Macbeth*. Again, their mixed reactions certainly go to show how difficult the task would be to meet the reading interests of each individual student in the classroom.

Similarly, the girls expressed a general dislike for the short story "Butcher Bird." Kate summed up how many of the girls felt when she indicated that she didn't know how to connect to any of the characters in the story. McCracken and Appleby (1992) support Kate's claim by stating that girls typically learn better by making those types of personal connections. I was also quite surprised at how angry the students seemed to get as the discussion of the short story continued. Whether it was frustration or actual disdain at the characters and their actions I will never know as none of them reflected on this anger in their responses or in their learning journals. I guess the best course of action in the future would be to bring myself back in to the discussion, draw the students' attention to the change in atmosphere or perhaps ask them to express in some written form what they see happening as the discussion unfolds. Again, possible areas for further study or perhaps inclusion in a future classroom activity.

On the final day of the project, I asked all of the students to take some time and reflect upon their experiences over the past ten days. They were given approximately 15 minutes of class time to jot down their reflections in their research journal in a somewhat spontaneous response and were given no specific guidance as to what topics to address. All of the students wrote something for this entry, focussing on a variety of things such as their favorite activities, what they had learned, things they did not like or would change and many others.

I did not plan to ask the students to complete this task until the oral scenes were completed and there was time remaining in the class. For some reason, I felt that

the students needed one more opportunity to express their thoughts, feelings and reactions. The short oral scenes they presented did not seem to bring closure to the project in my mind, so I asked them to finish with some writing. At the time, I felt that if I was going to have to look over the entire project and come to some new understandings about gender and teaching, then perhaps I should ask the students to undergo the same sort of reflective process. The following observations and understandings come from their journal reflections.

Reflections from the Male Students

By far, the most popular activities with the male students during my study were all the activities which dealt with gender, stereotyping and other gender related issues and the least popular were all the activities which related to the short stories directly.

Five boys specifically mentioned how much they enjoyed the collages. Mac noted that he still remembered the collages, one of the first activities, "because our guy's one was better than our girl's one was. We put more stuff on the guy's one because we know what we liked to do." Aaron simply stated that he "enjoyed the collages. That was probably the best thing I did. I haven't done that since a while." Norman indicated that the collages were the most enjoyable because he was "cutting, pasting, putting my interests down on paper in any way that I wanted to." These preferences seem to correspond to all the research that suggests boys are more deductive and far more spatially oriented. As well, the boys' positive reaction to the collage activity supports Baym's (1990) notion that teachers should perhaps rethink the dominance that traditional interpretive activities have in our English classrooms.

These comments are important ones, as I need to consider how I can use my classroom and the activities I design in ways to relate to the learning styles of boys, while not compromising the learning styles of girls. More visual assignments like collages as well as hands on or physical type activities that get students out of their desks should be a part of my units to complement the more traditional writing and reading assignments.

Four of the boys expressed a sense of delight with all the gender stereotyping that occurred in the classroom. Neil stated that it "was interesting to do all the stereotyping stuff. I felt that the guys were being totally bashed. If we said something

against the girls they totally ganged up on the person who said it." Mason thought "It was very interesting to see how the boys thought opposed to the girls." Mac noted how much he liked talking about the "aspects of gender stereotyping." Kurt stated that during the activities designed to bring out their notions of gender and stereotyping, "it seemed as if males and females were at war with each other." As boys do seem to thrive more in a competitive, debate type environment in the classroom, it makes sense that some of them would enjoy the sometimes heated discussions and debates that occurred around the issues of gender.

I realize how important it is not to discourage this type of discussion in the classroom, but try to direct the boys' eager enthusiasm into their classroom assignments. Writing assignments that give them an opportunity to express their opinions or debate ideas, such as argumentative or persuasive writing, or speech writing and delivery, as well as oral scene presentations that get them out of their desks, are some ideas I now feel I should look at for future planning.

Four of the boys commented on the round table discussions of the short stories. Mason "enjoyed this course because of the way the class went. The discussions were interesting because of the circle. I seemed to understand everything way more because of the circle." Darren liked the idea of having the students in control of the discussion. "Having us have our own discussion was really good for us. When were in our class discussions it was the whole of what the males thought compared to what the whole of the females thought." Mac "thought it was different to do something different. In a way it was nice to have group discussions on the stories we did instead of having to read it and then hope like heck you got everything important." He also made comments specifically related to the shift in the discussion that occurred during "Boys and Girls." He thought it was "really interesting to see how one person can change the topic totally. I thought that a lot of people got stuff off their chests, which [he thinks] really needed to be said." Will indicated that he had "noticed that the girls seemed to run the discussions" perhaps as a reflection of how relatively silent he was during the entire project.

Although a relatively small number of boys did comment on the round table discussions, I felt, from being present for them that they did appreciate the freedom they had to discuss what they wanted to in the open forum with their peers. I continued to use this discussion format with the same group as they worked through their English 30 course the following semester with even more success. The students

began to expect that we would be using the circle to discuss the literature and they were able to frame the discussions with enough variety so that they did not become repetitive or boring. Of course, they were not used all the time, but when they were, such as in the *A Streetcar Named Desire* unit, good strong discussions took place with the students, often beginning before I had even arrived in the classroom.

Most of the negative comments centred on the literature and all the activities, including the group work that was selected for the study. Aaron clearly stated in his journal that "The worst part of the project was the [responses]. I hate writing responses to dumb stories like "Boys and Girls" and other stories. I found out that I can't write spontaneously. It just doesn't work. Actually, I hate responses altogether." Will thought "that most of the stuff we discuss in English seems to be [irrelevant] in my mind. I am not very [analytical] as far as English goes." Mac stated that he "really didn't care for the "X" story, because it was not to exciting. It was actually really boring." Darren felt that "analyzing the stories for the same thing over and over was very repetitive." Neil felt that the short story "Boys and Girls" "sucked…I didn't think many other people liked this story. The same for 'Butcher Bird.' There wasn't much to begin with and I really didn't see much of a theme." Norman wrote that if the class was to "do something like this again, I do not wish to have Will in my group…In discussions he doesn't input anything." Neil also expressed some frustration with the group work, noting that "When I was in small mixed groups I found the role of note taking to be a waste of time because it was repetitive. Our group just said what we said in our same-sex groups." All of these negative comments seem to illustrate Gurian's (2001) conclusion that "boys generally don't like reading and writing as much" (p. 59) as girls do.

The rest of the negative comments directly related to the thesis project itself. Two boys, Darren and Sam were very candid in their journals, noting how they didn't like the project at all. Sam wrote that he "really thought about this thesis idea. In my opinion I thought it was a waste of time." He was concerned because the ten days of the project did place the class behind when it came to the last two remaining units. He felt that everyone in the class "already knew most of the gender stereotypes and all different ideas the two stories portrayed…I didn't really learn anything from this and am quite mad that we wasted so much time on it."

While I appreciate the comments made by these two boys, I do not in any way feel that the project wasted their time. Yes, they took part in the activities I designed

in order to facilitate my research, but there were many good things that came out of the experience for both the students and myself. The students found a forum for learning about literature, the round table, which they enjoyed. I learned how important it is to allow students' voices to ring through in responses to literature that are not always in the written form. I also believe that the whole research project, and their cooperation with me, built a sense of mutual respect that made the English 30 environment the following semester a very positive one full of learning and trust. They came to realize that it was their ideas that were the important ones, not just mine, and they valued the freedom and the trust I gave them to learn.

While most of the boys gave somewhat of a surface summary of their likes and dislikes, Kurt's response was quite different. His reflections were much more interpretive and looked at the overall project rather than the individual pieces. He wrote that:

> "From what I have experienced in this project, I realized that at first, males and females stereotyped each other largely. With the collages, and the heated discussions, it seemed as if males and females were at war with each other. Towards the end of the unit, it was as if the battle fizzled out and males and females learned to cooperate and share ideas. I saw this when the same sex groupings emerged into opposite sex groupings and when we did the scenes from the short stories." He also noted that "during the unit, I noticed how males are more lazy when it comes to reading and analyzing literature, and females are able to go deeper and find more symbolic things when they are reading a story.

Although this sense of cooperation that Kurt relates was in no way something I had anticipated, I have to admit I was quite thrilled that he saw this happen in the classroom. Kurt is a very quiet student in class and I believe that his quietness gave him the opportunity to sit back and notice more of the 'whole' of what was occurring. His comment has made me realize that it is not always going to be the critical analysis of the literature that will bring students together. What will create that sense of cooperation is giving the students the freedom to discuss meaningful issues arising from the literature, setting aside literary criticism.

Reflections from the Female Students

The boys seemed to like the hands-on collages more than any other activity, while the girls seemed to enjoy the class discussions. The feedback about the round table discussion format was very positive. Lauren wrote that when the class "started to put the desks in the big circle it was so interesting." Kate also reflected on how interesting the shift in the discussion during "Boys and Girls" was, intrigued at how the class just seemed to end "up talking directly about your thesis." Anna also made specific comments about the round table, saying how much she did like it, because it "brought out the most info." Rachel summarized her feelings, by pointing out to me that "this class knows how to discuss!" She also shared her concerns about the shyer students in the class, who didn't get a chance to share their ideas as well as the students who certainly got the discussions going each day. Again, looking at the girls' reactions to the round table, I am convinced that this particular discussion style could be a successful strategy for engaging students in literature.

Four of the girls specifically mentioned how fascinated they were at how boys and girls responded differently to the gender issues presented to them in the project. Kate thought that it "was weird to see how guys see things in relation to how girls see things." Barbara was also interested in how boys and girls react to English class and offered some of her own interpretations. She noted that boys "have a harder time analyzing and then explaining" and she believes this has something to do with what she calls "interest value." She noted that if "a story was filled with symbols that meant hockey good, ballet bad they would look for them more." She believed that girls are "interested in the whole idea that the symbol can mean a certain thing other than just an [inanimate] object." Rather than focusing on the gender issue activities, Alison felt that it was "a very interesting unit though, especially to see how the rest of the class feels the writer is saying about gender."

Amy made what I thought was an interesting as well as insightful comment about the literature studied and how boys and girls interpret those selections. She wrote that she has "learned that boys and girls interpret very differently. We are stuck in a time where all we read is literature about women cooking and cleaning and not doing yard work. This influences [the] class discussions. If we read about women going to university and men helping with housework [the] discussions would be a lot different." Looking back at the literature choices I had made for the students that

semester, she was very correct in her interpretation of my selections. Perhaps not only balancing gender, but also balancing the way in which the genders are represented, in both traditional and non-traditional roles, is equally as important to students. Although my study did not address the notion of traditional and non-traditional roles represented in literature, Amy's comment certainly reveals another interesting study possibility.

Overall, the girls took a much more personal stance in their reflections of the project, relating many of the happenings to themselves personally. Rachel explained to me that the reason her opinions were so different is because she has grown up with so many brothers. She also shared her opinion of gender stereotyping and bias, believing that "history books do focus more on things females have overcome than males. I think males have made progress, just not as much as males." Anna shared how much she enjoyed the oral reading of the short story "X "because when read to, "you get more of the emotion from the reader. This always helps me and I also really like to be read to." Kate enjoyed the experience, stating that it was "nice to actually do something in school that helps me as a student (get good grades) and actually contribute to something important." Barbara spent a great deal of her reflective journal response describing how she believes that parents influence their children's reading interests. She wrote that she hangs "around my father because I only have one father or parent…and I get along with male teachers more often than females teachers. I understand what they mean better then when a woman describes something." Amy compared herself to the narrator of "Boys and Girls", pointing out that in today's time, if she wants to be outside that is where she will be. "None of the girls in [this] class cook and clean all day. If we want to be outdoors we are. When I was little I loved to be outside. I played in the mud and sand and played with bugs and frogs and other [disgusting] things." It is because of this personal anecdote that Amy felt she could understand why the narrator wanted to be outside – and wanted to be a boy. All of these personal connections to the classroom experiences as well as the literature show that girls do need to make those connections in order to engage in the literature.

Only three of the girls' responses contained negative comments. Although Lauren enjoyed the round table discussions, she felt that "the more we had to have the discussions, the lest interesting or fun it got." She apologized, explaining that she knew it was part of my thesis project and was a good activity, but she "just felt that we over [analyzed] all of the stories we read." This reaction was not a surprising one as

the boys too had mentioned about over analyzing the stories for the same components as well as repeating the same type of activities too much. I guess the caution here is to not overdue an effective teaching technique – students like and need variety if they are to learn effectively.

Kate did not feel that all of the activities were as fun as others. "For example, by the time [the class] got to *Butcher Bird*, I was so tired of all the gender issues." Yes, the unit did contain more activities that allowed students to demonstrate their understanding and background relating to gender issues than I would probably have included in a thematic unit, so this reaction was not surprising. What was surprising was that the gender issues activities were the ones that the boys liked the most. If I introduce gender issues as a part of a thematic unit in the future, I would take these reactions into careful consideration.

The only female student who made a negative comment about the stories selected was Anna. She did not really like the story "Boys and Girls" "because it didn't really mean anything to me. I found herself straying…and actually adding things in." Again, the boys were much more vocal about their dislike of the short stories selected for the project. As the students have realized, there certainly is a dilemma in selecting literature for classroom study – not all students will gain an understanding of the selection and not all will truly appreciate the short story for its merits. However, balancing subject matter and gender representation in the literature is certainly something that a teacher could do as he or she selects pieces for formal study in the classroom.

As much as the girls wrote in these reflective entries, I found I learned much more from what the boys wrote. Perhaps the boys' candor and honesty helped me develop some of my new understandings with more clarity.

Reflections Influenced by the Use of Journals

Having used journals for so many years in my classrooms, I felt that using them to collect key data for my research project would be a natural way to integrate my project into my classroom. My reading about journals and the bias that seems to lean towards success for girls with this type of project was also intriguing to me. My colleagues did seem to acknowledge that yes, girls do tend to have fuller, more emotional responses, but the students who overall do well in English, male or female,

use them as they are intended – to explore and think about literature.

The use of Jerry Wowk's response format was in many ways, very successful in gathering the students' understanding of the literature. Both the boys and the girls seemed to be able to focus on a key significant idea that struck them about the text and show how that idea was developed. Sharing personal connections did not seem to be difficult and finding some sense of universality was also accessible to the students, male or female.

The one aspect of the journals that I did find somewhat surprising was how many students, even after going over the format for the response, both first look and second look, chose not to follow the three-section format. They selected to respond by organizing a variety of ideas in ways that seemed to be meaningful to them. As much as I really like Wowk's response format, as it does give the reluctant student a place in which to begin a response, I have been wondering if the format can be somewhat restrictive for students, taking them away from their true, individual responses to the text. I do see the value of Jerry's response type format, and will certainly introduce it to my students again, but I also believe that students should be given the opportunity to respond beyond the parameters of that format, and perhaps in a format that best captures their individual response. In other words, I would like to see a growth of response from the prescribed format, to a format designed by the individual student. Perhaps this growth will erase some of the gender bias that is seen in journals by allowing students to respond with their own authentic voices in a format that reflects an understanding and appreciation of the literature they have experienced for themselves.

The three-part format did make it difficult to gauge the students' appreciation of the text and this disappointed me. I felt confident that the reader's response journal was the one tool that was going to inform me the most about how students reacted to as well as understood the literature selections. In reflection, I was glad that I had chosen to include the metacognitive, or learning, journal that I had initiated at the beginning of their English 10 term the year before. They shared more of their reactions to the text and the ideas within the text, rather than discussions of the literary components. The most honest comments I received in relation to the students' personal reactions to the texts and the activities could be found in the metacognitive journals, and not in the reader's response. The boys had no difficulty in expressing their feelings regarding activities that were enjoyable, repetitive or ones that they felt

wasted their time. Even Aaron clearly stated that "The worst part of this project was the [responses]. I hate writing responses to dumb stories like "Boys and Girls" and other stories…Actually, I hate [responses] altogether."

The students' candor was not a surprise. They were given much more freedom to respond personally, and were not restricted to specific topics. The metacognitive journals also gave them an opportunity to respond to other occurrences and issues beyond the analysis of the text. These particular journals ended up being far more valuable to the project than the reader's response journals whose format I spent time selecting and implementing for the project. I would certainly consider continuing the use of this type of journal, seeing it as a valuable tool for students who learn about themselves, and for myself as I get a chance to truly see inside the minds of my students.

I don't feel like I can adequately address one of the initial questions I posed at the beginning of this project. Concerned with whether my gender influenced the students' understanding and appreciation of literature, I felt that the journals would help me collect some data in which to address this question. However, I don't feel that the journals assisted me in coming to any new understandings or observations. In class discussion, the male students seemed to agree with Neil, who indicated that he has been taught to look at literature through female eyes because his English teacher is female, and he has never been taught English by a male. The male students also seemed to agree with Mac who felt that I have difficulty understanding the way they communicate their ideas and they are penalized for that. He did seem to understand that a specific curriculum needed to be taught, but did indicate that the course was not meeting his reading needs, except when he was given the ability to choose what he wanted to read. Another comment made by Mac was that I had higher expectations for boys – they had to work harder to get a high grade than the girls did. Noticeably, it was also the boys who seemed to be the most negative when it came to the literature selected. Overall, few of them expressed that they enjoyed either "Boys and Girls" or "Butcher Bird" and some of them clearly expressed how they felt specific aspects of the project were a waste of time.

The girls never mentioned any particular feelings of bias in their English class, except to note that yes, girls are more emotional, and yes, girls do tend to express themselves better, making English an easier subject for them. They were in no way negative and did not feel that they were being penalized for being female in my

classroom. A couple of the girls expressed a sense of understanding that the selection of literature and activities would be difficult for a teacher who had many different needs to try and meet. They were, in general, quite tough on the boys, accusing them of being lazy and not working as hard as they could. I remember having a conversation with Kate after one of the classes after the project had ended and she was very insulted that the boys felt that the only reason she got good marks was because she was a girl. She felt that she worked very hard for her marks and if the boys would work as hard as she did, they would do well too. No girl ever indicated that boys did not have the ability to succeed in English. Nan and Kate both made specific comments to Mason about how powerful his poem from earlier in the term was, even if it wasn't focused on as emotional a topic as theirs was.

I guess what I have learned from this is that students at this level do understand some of the restrictions and influences that teachers have. They realize that there is a curriculum they must interact with and there is only a specific set of resources approved to meet that curriculum. They do understand that choices need to be made for them, but more than anything they do seem to appreciate the ability to make some choices on their own.

I also realized that perception can be dangerous and for some reason, with this particular class, there was a perception that the girls do better in English and it is possibly linked to the fact that I am a female teacher. The boys agreed that they may enjoy the choices a male teacher would make, that the male teacher would be able to explain things better, or perhaps understand them better, although many of them were uncomfortable with the whole notion of having a male teach them English. Although I am confident that I do not teach or evaluate with bias in my classroom, the perception was there with this group. I need to be constantly aware that each group of students will have a perception on the first day they walk into the classroom and that perception will continue to develop based on the choices I make. Perhaps again having the students engage in discussions of gender and their experiences with gender issues as done in this project would give myself and the students insight into these perceptions, bringing them forward for discussion. Cleary and Whittemore (1999) believe that enrichment opportunities are numerous when literature is approached through gender study. Gurian (2001) also supports this idea, believing:

> Whether it is math, social studies, English, gym or any other classroom,

> teaching young people how to understand who they are and who their eventual life partners are is a crucial part of the ultimate school. It is highly respectful of the developmental paths of young people, for whom learning literature and math is certainly important but is not, in the growing brain, compartmentalized away from psychosocial development (p. 291).

I also believe that giving students some additional freedom to make choices within the classroom will help them see that the teacher and the students can work together to create learning opportunities in the classroom. It is not only my job to dictate what will be studied and how it will be studied – it is theirs as well – and the new Senior High English Language Arts program certainly supports this notion.

The Best Laid Plans

In many ways, this particular research project was not the one I had first envisioned in my thesis proposal design course. Initially, I had decided to work collaboratively with a male colleague. Together, we would plan and deliver lessons on chosen short stories in my classroom. The students would be given an opportunity to learn from a male and a female teacher, and I would get a chance to see how a male teacher's choices were similar or different to that of my own. I would also give my students a chance to reflect on the differences they saw and felt with a male teacher working with them. I was also quite interested in the whole notion of collaboration, having had such positive experiences with my work on the Teacher Review Team for the new Senior High English Language Arts program. However, my male colleague and I never seemed to be able to get together to work on the project – heavy teaching schedules and some personal struggles made our collaboration difficult. Therefore, I was in a position where I had to modify my design and come up with a way to look at gender in my classroom without the benefit of a male teacher's perspective.

I still believe that my initial project design would make a very interesting study, although it is very different from the one that occurred in my classroom. My project was much more personal and yes, quite autobiographical, which probably would have been lost in a more collaborative study, as there would have been two teacher voices rather than one. Perhaps it would have been beneficial to actually plan and work through activities with a male teacher rather than rely on myself – it may

have revealed more about whether teacher gender does influence choices. However, even in dialogue with my male colleagues via email, I believe that the gender of the teacher is only one of the many influences that impact both teachers and their students. Based on my classroom experiences with this project, I would say that the teacher's gender influences the students more so than the choices teachers make for literature and the corresponding activities.

With the study redesigned, with my choices alone being used, I was able to realize that it would be impossible to consider only gender as an influence in my classroom choices. My colleagues clearly showed me that other issues, such as the needs of the class, cultural diversity, available resources as well as stories that just simply work with the age group are also key factors.

I also believe that by delivering the lessons without my male colleague allowed my students to feel comfortable enough to be candid in their metacognitive journals and strong, confident communicators during the classroom discussions. I remember doing a small research project in a friend's classroom and found that the students saw me as an outsider and the cooperation, as well as the product, was not useful to us as my friend and I got together to report our findings. Certainly, reflecting back on the strength of the students' voices in this document, the absence of the male teacher from my classroom was a strong advantage for my data collection.

After working so diligently to put this document together, I have also come to realize how valuable it would have been to have video or audio taped the ten lessons delivered in my classroom. I know for a fact, especially as time passed, that some of the data ended up falling between the pages of the students' research journals, metacognitive journals as well as my own research jottings. I took extensive notes during the discussions of the literature and other gender related activities, but I am sure I completely missed some comments made by students, or did not get all that they had said. Plus, other factors, such as body language, student positioning in the classroom as well as close monitoring of the group work was nearly impossible with me as the only researcher in the room. Yes, I believe the study would be somewhat enriched by the inclusion of video or audio tape, but I am still quite pleased with what I was able to record and report. The data I collected has provided me with insights into the workings of my English classroom.

The absence of a second female colleague as well as a second female student interview subject bothered me a great deal as my project closed and this document

began to grow. I honestly felt, being a somewhat symmetrically obsessed person, that it was important to have a balance of voices in the chapters where the voices were the most detailed. I do not like the idea that one female colleague's voice and one female student's voice are used as a sort of representative female voice, but the circumstances surrounding this project made it impossible to be represented any differently. With the chance to do additional research in my own classroom a distinct possibility, personally for professional growth, I would certainly try to include more voices as it was these comments relating to specific questions that provided me with some important new understandings about my classroom.

The Students' Epilogue

More than a year and a half has passed since this thesis project began in my classroom. As I have been analyzing my data, reading research and preparing this document, my students have also gone on with their lives and experiences. I felt as I was putting this last chapter together that it would be important to share some information about the students as they moved into English 30. I do feel that in some ways, this document is as much theirs as it is mine, their voices ringing throughout the pages.

All but three of the students who took part in this research project continued on into my English 30 class in semester one of the following year and there were no new enrollments. The group was as cohesive as it had ever been. They specifically asked to begin the year with Shakespeare, being dissatisfied with a somewhat quick version of *Macbeth* in June.

The overall class and its quirky habits did not really change in the two months that separated the English 20 from English 30 course. Norman and Lauren still dominated most of the classroom discussions, with Mac, Mason, Aaron, Neil and Kurt being the sometimes quiet, sometimes boisterous challengers, who just liked to say things to get the girls going. The feelings that the boys had about me as an English teacher not being able to truly understand them still existed, although with a degree of understanding and acceptance. When the boys did work hard, they received the marks and they would be the first to say so. Mac's mother even called me once during the term to double check a mark of 80% that Mac had received on a poem. She told me that her son was also surprised, but quite proud of his piece. However, when the boys

would congregate in the industrial education lab in the eighty-minute block before English 30 and attempt to throw together their assignments, they did not do as well and would be the first to admit fault. The industrial education teacher used to tease me in the staff room about how his class had turned into an English homework completion class.

I think the most interesting thing that I saw happen during the term was the degree to which all of the students were interested in each other's success in the course and on the exam. I discovered throughout the term that Will had been working with Kate to improve his mark. Barbara had been getting Rachel and Alison to look over her writing assignments. Kate and Mason would spend time on dancing tours to discuss assignments as well as the literature they were studying. I had no difficulty in putting any two students together to work as partners. Even one of the quiet, less popular boys was often sought out by the girls for his introspective and somewhat off-key approaches to literature. A strong sense of healthy competition, coupled with cooperation existed for the term – I guess what the researchers would call a balanced, equitable classroom.

As well, I was able to continue to incorporate choice reading assignments in the course to attempt to meet the reading preferences of my students. They were required to complete one booktalk on a book of their choice. They also had to complete a poetry reading assignment that allowed them to select the pieces they wished to read and respond to. I also presented them with a non-fiction travel unit, which I had received from a colleague but had never tried. This unit gave them a chance to work independently as well as collaboratively on travel essays of their choice. They also had choices about the assignments they completed for the selected essays.

I also managed to select pieces of literature that the students enjoyed. *Hamlet* was a favorite, probably because we could spend the time and did not have to rush – plus all the blood at the end tends to make the piece memorable. As well, the play *A Streetcar Named Desire* was a surprise hit with the class. The boys really seemed to connect to Stanley and the other male characters, while the girls seemed to connect to Stella. Both the boys and the girls had interesting thoughts to share in round table regarding Blanche. They were required to do some research on the film and the director, which they found interesting in light of the censorship issue. As well, they were given creative assignments to complete in the unit that included a found poem as

well as a writing or representation of a comparison between a character and a piece of music of their choosing. A new unit for me that I can't wait to teach again.

When the students received their grades in the mail from their diploma examinations, I was on maternity leave, spending the days at home with my brand new baby boy and my older son. I went to the school to talk to each one of them. Mason was so excited, having received a 78% on the writing portion of his exam. I remember telling him that his essay on *Night*, which he briefly outlined to me the day he wrote, just to get my immediate feedback, would be the best essay he had ever written. He put a great deal of work into the preparation of the literature, which I know contributed to the confident way he explored the topic. However, I also know that the little non-fiction book that he had willingly read in English 20 and willingly re-read in English 30 for the course requirements was something he enjoyed, understood and felt that passion for. The smile on his face as he told me what he had accomplished was huge and I was proud of him.

After the thesis project had ended, Mac went on a three week trip to Poland, where he visited the concentration camp, Auchwitz. He brought back pictures, which he shared with the class during our study of *Night*. He shared more than the pictures – he also shared his strong emotional reaction to what he had seen in that camp. He brought books he had purchased, which also dealt with the holocaust – ones that he had read on the plane home. A passion for that little non-fiction book was again apparent, and was one he too took into his diploma examination. With a look of disbelief on his face, he shared with me that he had received 90% on his written portion of the exam. The one student who felt that his voice could never be understood by me, expressed his knowledge and understanding of a topic in a voice that no marker could mistake. He too was proud, especially after the initial shock wore off. Gurian (2001) states that females hold the advantage in standardized tests in essay format and boys hold the advantage in multiple choice format exams. I guess my two boys, who received the highest marks in the class, were the exception to that piece of brain research.

Rachel, whose reading background is extensive, took what she felt was a real risk on the diploma exam and wrote about a book she had read independently *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. When we were having our class discussion about the minor responses, where the students had to respond to a poem, she felt very uncomfortable and concerned as her interpretations did not seem to fall into the realm of what the

majority of the others had said. Willing to take risks, she sat back patiently and waited for her results. She was more than pleased with her 81%. I remember telling her, after she phoned me at home with her results, how proud I was that she took a risk. I could see her smile, even through the phone as she agreed with me.

Kurt, not surprisingly, also received a strong 82% on the written portion of his diploma exam. He was very reluctant to share what he had written about with me on the day of the exam. I can't even recall what tidbits he did tell me. However, I knew that he would do well as his confident expression of ideas was always apparent, even though he was quite shy during the class discussions.

All of my students did well on the exam, which of course, was only one small part of the course. As much as the boys teased me that they couldn't wait until English was over and were unsure if they could actually light the books on fire because the fire would be dangerously high, I knew that the atmosphere was certainly one they were going to miss. What other classroom were they given almost complete control over their learning?

My students and I have come a long way since I first posed the questions regarding the influence of gender in my classroom. Sometimes, the journey has felt like a long and arduous one. Speaking for myself, I know that this project has informed me a great deal about how boys and girls learn and about how my choices in the classroom affect my students. Norman (2001) pauses to reflect on the importance of writing in her life. "The writing that has become as much a part of my life as mothering and teaching is informed by the teaching that I do, by the students I meet, by the stories that we live together and separately" (p. 19). This particular study as well as the thesis in its written form have also become a part of my life and have informed my teaching and learning practice. Norman (2001) believes that "no autobiography is ever over" (p. 52) and I have to agree with her. The representation of my classroom in these pages as well as the students' whose voices resonate throughout them will be a very important part of my ever-changing teaching story.

I have also come to realize that boys and girls do learn differently, and these differences must be taken into account in the classroom. Norman (2001) states that "Perhaps it is in the doing that we find (our)selves when we feel lost, in the doing that we lose (our)selves so something can be found" (p. 138). I know that all of the new understandings I have found about my students, myself and my practice will affect my classroom choices, having realized the power that choice has for both my students and

myself.

I no longer feel lost.

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APPENDIX A
Lessons as Planned

Activity One

Gender – Gaining an Understanding

1. Have students write down what they believe the word "gender" means.
2. Have students write down qualities and characteristics they consider to be male and female.

   *hand out with the space for gender definition and for male/female qualities/characteristics. Break them into same sex groups and have them share their ideas about a definition and the qualities.

   *have them come up with a common definition they all agree on and a common list of qualities/characteristics they can all agree on.
3. Have the groups make a mini-image cluster that illustrates their qualities and characteristics for each gender.

   *I will have to get glue sticks, paper, and lots of magazines for this

   *I don't want it to turn into a huge collage project, but one they can work on in class and have completed by end of class – group effort is important (same sex group).

   *a single sheet layout can really communicate the differences in assumptions being made about traits that are male and female

   *have students choose a spokesperson, who will record ideas shared during the image gathering process and who will share the collage with the rest of the class in activity two.
4. Have students respond in their learning journals to these activities today.
5. Read, "Boys and Girls" by Alice Munro for Activity #3. First look reader's response entry required (specific instruction on these already done earlier in unit).

English 20 **Name** _____

Understanding Gender
Activity One

My definition of gender is:

The dictionary tells me gender is:

Qualities/Characteristics of Females	***Qualities/Characteristics of Males***

English 20 **Group Members**_____

Understanding Gender
Activity One

Our group's definition of gender is:

Group Brainstormed Qualities/Characteristics of Females	***Group Brainstormed Qualities/Characteristics of Males***

Activity Two

Gender – Thinking about Expectations

1. Share collages and ideas brought forth while making the collages in large group. Chosen spokesperson should present both. Post visuals around the room and have the groups speak to them. Facilitate discussion amongst the students.
2. Have students get back into same same-sex groupings as in previous activity.
3. Oral read of the short story, "X" by Lois Gould (*Literary Experiences I*). Ask students to complete some spontaneous writing (free-write) following. This idea is put forward by Probst. It will allow students to gather their ideas and respond immediately after hearing the story. Then, I want to initiate class discussion with students, based on their spontaneous responses and also get out some of the ideas surrounding gender identity, socialization and expectations, which are all prevalent in this short story.
4. Hand out the chart dealing with gender and expectations. Students need to fill in expectations they believe exist for each of the genders, both historically and now. This is important as the short story is historical in nature and an understanding of the history and change of expectation will help students make sense of context. I am also hoping that this activity will help them link thematically with the short story as it focus on expected behavior for specific genders.
5. Share expectations with large group. Record groups' ideas on a large piece of paper and keep it posted during entire unit. Facilitate discussion with group.
6. Learning journal entry on today's activities.
7. Reading and first look entry for "Boys and Girls" needs to be ready for next class.

English 20 **Group Members** _____

Gender Expectations
Activity Two

Expectations of Females	***Expectations of Males***
Then	**Then**
Now	**Now**

Activity Three
Literary Analysis – "Boys and Girls" by Alice Munro

1. Break students up into six groups. Three groups will be all female and three groups will be all male. I will do this randomly in class.

   First, I will ask each group to share their first look responses with each other. This should hopefully give them springboards for discussion and analysis.

   Each group will choose a recorder who will take down the important aspects of the group discussion, once the sharing and then the following analysis takes place.

2. The four literary elements I specifically want to focus on, which I think hint at the ideas of gender in this short story are symbolism, character development, conflict and theme.

   I have grouped conflict and theme together as they are so closely linked. This gives me three categories to work with. The female groups will get one of the three and the male groups will get one of the three.

3. In the groups, the students will analyze the story for their assigned element, providing details, explanations, quotations for support.

   I will be asking the groups to choose a specific recorder who will take notes regarding the discussion that the group is engaged in, as well as some description of the way in which the group worked together.

   They will be responsible to use the notes taken by the recorder to create an informational chart that demonstrates their group analysis. This chart will be smaller – notebook size - that they will be able to use in the collaboration that will happen in the next activity. The students will be told that I will be collecting their group discussion notes and the charts after the collaboration and presentations to be done in the next activity.

4. Learning journal entry to be completed on today's class.

Activity Four
Literary Analysis (Class Discussion)– "Boys and Girls" by Alice Munro

1. To open the class, I want to get the literary element matching female and male groups together to collaborate and share ideas. The note takers from before (the one male and the one female) will again continue their duties, writing down the key ideas shared in this collaborative effort as well as writing down observations as to how the combined groups worked together. They will be the two people responsible for sharing the ideas generated by the two groups.
2. As well, I will be asking the groups to take their charts, and pull information together to form one collaborative chart that shows how they have worked as a group to bring together, modify and enhance their small group analysis.
3. I am considering asking the recorder to place the female groups' responses that are used on the chart in one color and the male groups' responses in a different color. That may raise some interesting conversational ideas.
4. Large group discussion of literary elements as well as observations as to how the groups worked together – maybe even some discussion of what they notice about male and female responses.
5. Assign second look journal entry on the short story.
6. Learning journal entry to be completed on today's class.

Activity Five
Film Analysis – "Boys and Girls" by Alice Munro

1. Show the film version (with Meagan Follows – that is all I remember) of the short story, "Boys and Girls."
2. Have students once again complete a spontaneous response, immediately following the viewing of the film. I will be collecting these as data.
3. Have students move into same sex groups (the same as they were in before) and share their spontaneous responses with each other. Same recorder idea, but no chart.
4. Then, have the students get into the mixed groups from before and do the same. Same recorder idea, but no chart.
5. Share responses with large group. Facilitate class discussion.
6. Assign a second look response, allowing them to focus on the film, and again reflecting on the short story, if they wish to.

Activity 6
Gender Stereotypes – "Butcher Bird" – Stegner

1. Hand out question sheet, asking students to give their perceptions of the best parts of being male and the best parts of being female.

   Have students share ideas with large group. Facilitate discussion of gender stereotyping and examples they see around them.

2. Begin oral read of "Butcher Bird" by Stegner. Have two female

   students and two male students volunteer to continue the oral read of the short story. I want to lend both voices to the reading of the literature.

3. Assign first-look journal response. Students are going to be encouraged to make any connections or comment on any contrasts they see between this short story and "Boys and Girls."

4. Assign learning journal response.

English 20 **Name** _____
Gender Roles- Stereotyping
Activity Six

In my opinion, the best part of being a male is

In my opinion, the best part of being a female is:

Gender stereotyping is:

Some examples of gender stereotyping are:

Activity 7

Gender Issues and Group Activities Related to "Butcher Bird"

1. Hand out questionnaire, encouraging students to complete at least FOUR of the questions that speak to them. Students will be encouraged to respond in their learning journals.
2. Have students share ideas with large group. Facilitate discussion of gender issues and their responses to the questions.
3. Same group activities for analysis as with "Boys and Girls." Students will be given the remainder of this class and some of next class to complete the small same sex group work and the larger mix group sharing sessions.
4. Learning journal response assigned.

English 20 **Name** _____

Gender Issues That Affect You
Activity Seven

Specifically, name some gender related issues that concern you the most

In your learning journal, jot down your responses to the following questions:

1. Is the gender of an author a criterion you use to select literature you read for personal enjoyment? Why or why not.
2. How important is it that the literature you read contains a protagonist who matches your gender? Explain.
3. In what ways does your English course meet your reading preferences? In what ways does it not? Give specific details.
4. What is your opinion on the notion that men and women use different language to communicate their ideas, creating a male way of speaking and a female way of speaking? Do you think this idea is true for writers as well? Defend your answer.
5. Do you believe any of your school courses to be "male" courses or "female" courses. Defend your answers.
6. Describe two teachers who have acted as role models for you in the past. What is it about them that make them a role-model in your eyes?
7. In your past experiences, are there any opportunities you believe you missed out on because of your gender? Explain.
8. Are there any future opportunities you are concerned about missing out on because of your gender? Explain.

Activity Eight
Group Activities on "Butcher Bird" Continued…

1. Allow at least 20 minutes for same sex groups to finish discussion.
2. Move into mixed groups for sharing of ideas. Again, have recorder to some color coding of male and female responses.
3. Facilitate large group sharing of ideas.
4. Assign second-look response.
5. Assign learning journal response as well.

Activity Nine
Group Activities on "Butcher Bird" Continued…And Final Projects

1. Allow time to finish large group discussion of "Butcher Bird" and any comments students want to make regarding the two short stories together. I may have to ask students to consider this option as it may not come out on its own and I want to hear their ideas regarding this.
2. Go over two assignments:

   Writing Assignment – character motivation

   *complete a piece of writing of their format choice that reflects one of the characters from either short story

   *hint at things like a journal or a monologue or a first person narrative or letter, etc.

   Assigned Scene Improvisations – cross-gendered adaptations of scene from the short stories.

   *have students choose from a hat (that is set up so that female and male groups get at least one scene that matches the gender of the group and one scene that doesn't
3. Assign second -look journal response.
4. Assign learning journal response as well.

ENGLISH 20
Short Story - "Boys and Girls'"- "Butcher Bird"
Character Motivation Scene Interpretation

Group Members _____

Interpretation of Story Scene 1 2 3 4 5 ____

Character Interpretations 1 2 3 4 5 ____

Total ____
10

APPENDIX B
Lessons as Lived

Activity One
Gender – Gaining an Understanding

1. Provide students with activity one handout. Have them write down what they believe the word 'gender ' means. Encourage them to use their own words and then go to the dictionary, copying down both.
2. Have students write down qualities and characteristics they consider to be male and female.

   *use the handout with space for gender definitions and for male/female qualities/characteristics

3. Break students into same sex groupings and have them share their ideas about a definition of gender and the male/female qualities/characteristics.

   *have groups select a recorder and provide them with a handout designed to help them guide the recording process.

   *the groups will be: 2 groups of 4 boys, 1 group of 3 boys

   1 group of 4 girls, 2 groups of 3 girls

4. Have the groups make a mini-image cluster that illustrates their qualities and characteristics for each gender.

   *provide students with 8x14 paper, glue sticks, construction paper, magazines, tissue paper, pipe cleaners, scissors, paint and paint brushes.

   *recorder acts as the observer, writing down their group's comments during the creation of the representation.

   *students are encouraged to represent in any visual way they wished – it didn't have to be a standard collage, which they are the most used to.

5. Have students respond in their learning journals to these activities today.

Activity Two
Gender – Thinking about Expectations

1. Have students reform into same sex groups assigned yesterday. Ask them to discuss the representations and which ideas they wish to share with the larger group.

   Have each group select a spokesperson. Chosen spokesperson should present both the male and female aspects of the representation.

2. Have students form into round table discussion circle. Facilitate discussion of gender and male/female characteristics as represented in the visuals.
3. Oral read of the short story "X" by Lois Gould (*Literary Experiences I*). Ask students to complete a spontaneous free write response immediately following the oral read. Then, initiate some class discussion with students, based on their spontaneous responses and also get out some of the ideas surrounding gender identify, socialization and expectations, which are all prevalent in this short story.
4. Hand out short story "Boys and Girls" by Alice Munro – assign reading and first look reader's response entry for Activity 4.
5. Learning journal entry assigned for today.

Activity Three
Gender – Thinking about Expectations (continued)

1. Finish class discussion generated from the short story "X" by Lois Gould.
2. Hand out chart dealing with gender and expectations (Activity Two). Ask students to fill in expectations they believe exist for each of the genders, both historically and now. This is important as the stories are historical in nature and an understanding of the history and change of expectation will help students make sense of context. I am also hoping that this activity will help them link thematically with the short story as if focuses on expected behavior for specific genders.
3. Share students' responses with large group. Use chart paper to record responses. Use blue and red ink to differentiate between the males' responses and the females' responses. Keep this chart posted in the room for remainder of project. Facilitate a class discussion on the topic of gender and expectations.
4. Learning journal entry due for today's activities.
5. Reading and first look reader's response entry for "Boys and Girls" needs to be ready for next class.

Activity Four
Literary Analysis – "Boys and Girls" by Alice Munro

1. Have students get together in their same sex groupings from previous activities.
2. Have students share their first look responses with each other. This is designed as a springboard for discussion and analysis of the short story.

   *each group will choose a recorder who will take down the important aspects of the group discussion, once the sharing and then the following analysis takes place.
3. The groups were then asked to select specific literary elements that arose from their initial sharing session to analyze specifically. The groups analyzed the story for their chosen elements, providing details, explanations and quotations to support their interpretations.
4. The single sex groups worked for 40 minutes. They were then paired with another single sex group of the opposite gender for 30 minutes. They were asked to share the ideas they came up with in the smaller groups and to continue their analysis in the mixed sex groups. Ideas to be shared next class. The two recorders continued with their roles as the large group shared ideas.
5. Learning journal assigned for today's class.

Activity Five
Literary Analysis (Class Discussion) – "Boys and Girls" by Alice Munro

1. Mixed sex groups were given some time to complete their discussion and make sure the recorders had written down the information they wanted to share in the class discussion.
2. Students placed desks in a circle, the round table discussion format. Students lead the discussion, sharing the ideas their groups came up with during their analysis of the short story. Ideas were shared regarding the story, issues of gender in school as well as effective group work. Each of the six recorders were asked to continue their role as recorders in this large group discussion, although all students took notes as the ideas were shared.
3. Learning journal entry was assigned for today's class.

Activity Six
Film Analysis – "Boys and Girls" by Alice Munro

1. Show the film version (with Meagan Follows – that is all I remember) of the short story, "Boys and Girls." I asked students to "jot down things that strike you as you view." We initially did talk a bit about different mediums used to present a similar story and the expectations that audiences of visuals have versus expectations that audiences of written text have.
2. Have students once again complete a spontaneous response, immediately following the viewing of the film. I directed them a bit into considering how effective the film was in capturing the author's theme and raising gender issues. I will be collecting these as data. They were given fifteen minutes to respond. I said, "talk to me."
3. Have students move into same sex groups (the same as they were in before) and share their spontaneous responses with each other. Same recorder idea, but no chart. They were given fifteen minutes to complete this.
4. Then, have the students get into the mixed groups from before and do the same. Same recorder idea, but no chart. They were also given fifteen minutes to complete this. The female recorders were asked to focus on the female responses and the male recorders were asked to focus on the male responses.

Activity Seven
Film Analysis/Gender Stereotypes – "Boys and Girls" by Alice Munro

1. Share responses with large group. Facilitate class discussion.
2. Assign second look response for the short story. Go over Jerry Wowk's format once again so students are aware of what they are responsible to respond to.
3. Hand out the question sheet, asking students to give their perceptions of the best parts of being male and the best parts of being female.
4. Share ideas with large group. Facilitate discussion.
5. Hand out essay topic for the unit and discuss.
6. Assign learning journal response for today's activities.

Activity 8
Gender Stereotypes – "Butcher Bird" – Wallace Stegner

1. Begin oral read of "Butcher Bird" by Stegner. Have two female students and two male students volunteer to continue the oral read of the short story.
2. Assign first look readers' response for the short story. Again, review Jerry Wowk's format. Encourage students to make connections between this short story and "Boys and Girls."
3. Hand out questionnaire, encouraging students to complete at least FOUR of the questions that speak to them. Students will be encouraged to respond in their learning journals.
4. Have students share ideas with large group. Facilitate discussion of gender issues and their responses to the questions.
5. Learning journal assigned for today's activities.

Activity 9
Gender Stereotypes – "Butcher Bird" – Wallace Stegner

1. Have students finish the discussion started yesterday relating to the questions they responded to.
2. Same group activities for analysis as with "Boys and Girls." Students will be given the remainder of this class and some of next class to complete the small same sex group work and the larger mix group sharing sessions.
3. Learning journal response assigned.

Activity 10
Group Activities – "Butcher Bird" – Wallace Stegner

1. Allow fifteen to twenty minutes for mixed sex groups to share ideas in groups.
2. Outline assignments to come tomorrow – oral presentation and written assignment as a spontaneous draft in class.
3. Facilitate class discussion on "Butcher Bird." Again, a student led discussion in round table format.
4. Learning journal response assigned.

Activity 11
Group Activities – "Butcher Bird" – Wallace Stegner

1. Allow time to finish large group discussion of "Butcher Bird" and any comments students want to make regarding the two short stories together. I may have to ask students to consider this option as it may not come out on its own and I want to hear their ideas regarding this.
2. Go over two assignments:

   Writing Assignment – character motivation

   *complete a piece of writing of their format choice that reflects one of the characters from either short story

      *hint at things like a journal or a monologue or a first person narrative or letter, etc.

   Assigned Scene Improvisations – cross-gendered adaptations of ONE of the scene from the short stories.

   *have students work together in mixed groups to select a scene that will allow at least ONE of the genders to represent a gender other than their own.
3. Assign second -look journal response. Format for second look response reviewed again in class
4. Assigned learning journal response as well.

Activity 12
Oral Presentations and Student Reflections

1. Students move into their groups to finalize plans for their oral presentations. Groups are given 10 minutes to rehearse/discuss /plan.
2. Groups present their scenes. Questions/discussion follow the presentation of the scenes. Led by students – a reaction to what they saw different in the interpretations. Students are asked to reflect on each group's presentation in their research journal.
3. Students are asked to reflect on the entire research project in their research journals. No specific prompt is given – students can respond to/discuss any aspects of the project they wish to.
4. Writing assignment – persona writing as well as first and second look responses to "Boys and Girls" and "Butcher Bird" to be collected at the end of the class as the journals are turned in.

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Educational Background

September, 1996	Accepted to University of Alberta Master's Program Department of Secondary Education Specialization: Secondary English Education Anticipated Completion Date : Spring 2002
December, 1991	Bachelor of Education with Distinction University of Alberta Secondary Education Major: English Minor: French (FSL)
June, 1987	Advanced High School Diploma with Excellence Oilfields Junior/Senior High School Black Diamond, AB

Teaching Experience

Employment History

September, 1992 - present	English Language Arts Teacher, Grades 7-12 Calmar School P.0. Box 30, Calmar, AB, T0C 0V0 Phone: (780) 985-3515 Fax: (780) 985-3682 Principal : Mr. Stephen Lindop
September, 2001 - present	English Language Arts Lead Teacher - 10-12 Black Gold Regional School Division 3rd Floor, 1101-5th Street Nisku, AB, T9E 7N3 Phone: (780) 955-6025 wk (780) 929-6071 hm Fax: (780) 955-6050

Publications

Professional Journals

Helgren, K.L. (1996). "Building Poet Craft in the Classroom," *Alberta English*, 34 (2), 5.

Presentations

Presenter, University of Alberta sponsored conference on Qualitative Research Methods - Fantasyland Conference Centre, Edmonton, Alberta, February, 1999.

Presenter, University of Alberta English Language Arts APT students callback session, Edmonton, March 12, 2001. Presentation on Metacognition and the new Senior High English Language Arts Program of Studies.

Presenter, English Language Arts Council Conference - as part of a teacher team working with Alberta Learning - presenting information on the new Program of Studies, Banff, Alberta, May 5-7, 2000.

Presenter, Edmonton Regional Consortia - Orientation Session for the new Senior High English Language Arts Program of Studies, Barnett House, Edmonton, May 8, 2001.

Presenter, Black Gold Regional School Division Professional Development Workshops, Leduc, December 7, 2001. Workshop on Metacognition and the new Senior High English Language Arts Program.

Presenter, Black Gold Regional School Division Professional Development Workshops, Leduc, February 1, 2002. Workshop on Collaboration and the new Senior High English Language Arts Program.

Presenter, University of Alberta English Language Arts APT students callback session, Edmonton, March 22, 2002. Presentation on the new Senior High English Language Arts Program of Studies.

Professional Experiences

Contracted by Alberta Learning to complete revisions on the Senior High English Language Arts Guide to Implementation, January, 2002 - March 2002.

Writer/Content Editor/Curriculum Validator, working with Alberta Distance Learning Centre on the development of new materials for the new Senior High English

Language Arts Program of Studies, Barrhead, March, 2001 - June 2001 and January, 2002 - August 2002.

Member, Focus Group for the development of a CD ROM on Presentation and Research Skills, hosted by Alberta Learning, January 2001 - March 2001.

Participant in the Field Validation Project for the Senior High English Language Arts Program of Studies at the grade 10 level, September 2000 - June, 2001.

Participant in the Pre-Pilot Project for the Senior High English Language Arts Curriculum which pre-piloted outcomes from the new English program at the grade 10 level, September 1999 - May, 2000.

Member of the Teacher Review team for the new Western Canadian Protocol Program of Studies adaptation for Senior High English Language Arts grades 10-12, contributing to the development of the new program outcomes, September 1998 - June 2000.

Lead Marker, English 33 Diploma Examinations, January and June 2000, and January 2001.

Member, Item Building Committee, English 33 Multiple Choice Examinations, August, 2000.

Research assistant for a University of Alberta professor Dr. Jim Parsons, assisting in the development of a student teacher handbook and doing some preliminary background reading on second language learning and student-teacher education, Fall/Winter, 1996.

Professional Affiliations

Member, Alberta Teacher's Association

Member, English Language Arts Council

Member, Graduate Students' Association - University of Alberta

Personal Interests

I enjoy watching and participating in many sports, including baseball, basketball and volleyball. I also enjoy outdoor activities such as camping and fishing.

I also love being a participant in local theatre, on stage and behind the scenes.

I am an avid reader of all types of literature, with a special love of both modern and classic fiction, poetry and Shakespearean drama.

I also have a home business with a friend, catering children's birthday parties.

References

Available upon request.